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Satish Gujral *Illustrations on pages 54, 62, 76, 86 and 94*
Book Reviews

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गु० कां० विश्वविद्यालय
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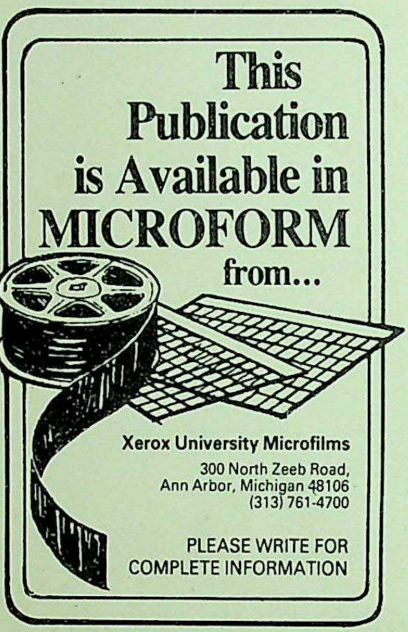
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Illustrations on page nos. 6, 38, 52, 76 & 92.

Some Paradigms of the Creative Process

Pupul Jayakar

An immensely old school of philosophy the Sankhya, based on the conservation, transformation and dissipation of energy, as also concepts of space and time, described the ultimate ground of the universe and all manifestation as Prakriti, the first cause, the female principle, primeval matter, undifferentiated, holding within it both the expressed and the pre-expressed, without beginning and without end. Within her lay dormant, the potential seed of sprouting. The root meaning of the word "Pra-Kriti" was Pra=excellent, Kriti=creation, excellent creation.

The three constituents of Prakriti as unmanifested ground in a state of total equilibrium, were Satva as essence or luminous intelligence, with the tendency to manifestation, for reflection, but without mass or gravity and therefore unable to manifest. Tamas as matter, mass, gravity, volume and density, the ingredients of manifestation, but with inertia which made any independent movement or action impossible. And Rajas as energy, the moving principle, that could counteract and disperse the inertia of Tamas.

When touched by Rajas as energy, the inertia inherent in Tamas as matter, mass and gravity was overcome. The process of evolution and the coming into being of the universe was by challenge to Prakriti as equilibrium – by the touch of Purusha, as the luminous, the male immutable principle. What triggered the happening is never satisfactorily explained.

Every phenomenon was a transformation of energy and disturbance in the equilibrium of these three elements, of Satva, Rajas and Tamas. A play of these three coming together and moving apart was the bringing of form out of non-being, out of its pre-manifest state – to a state of revealing or manifestation. The infinite manifestations of the world arose from the multiple ways the three gunas come together – the one playing a dominant role.

The three gunas could neither be created nor destroyed. The totality of mass and energy was for every constant.

If Sankhya was the ground, Tantra and alchemy provided the scenario for exploration. The Tantric seers or Siddhas seeking to contact the sources of inexhaustible energy and comprehend natural laws and material phenomena created physical and psychical instruments to probe and penetrate into the manifest and unmanifest, evolving aural and visual symbols in which to hold the imponderables. Finding them in the mystery and magic of austere abstraction, in mandala, mantra and yantra, they saw that the absoluteness of the geometric form gave it a symmetry that could never be fractured. Identical from all sides, nothing could be added to it, nothing taken away.

The most ancient worship of the primeval source of energy, as the one alone, the ancient yet ever young earth mother, was through hieroglyph. The recent discovery at a paleolithic site in Siddhi district of Madhya Pradesh of a sacred circular altar on which was placed a triangle pointing downwards, establishes the links of the archaic mother as energy with geometric form. The dating of these paleolithic finds is expected to be 8000 to 10,000 B.C. In contemporary habitations in the surrounding areas, circular altars with triangles are installed and worshipped as Angari mata, the primeval mother as fire providing an unbroken tradition of visual form and meaning stretching to 10,000 years.

Ancient texts which codify magical formula describe the virgin mother assuming in times of creation the form of a triangle in preservation the form of a straight line, similarly in destruction she was manifest as the circle.

The triangle a geometric form which uses a minimum of lines to enclose space and create form, symbolises the earth in its very aspect of sprouting or "coming to be". As the holder of energy, the triangle is the yoni, the tool of creation. In her form as a straight line, she is the vertical moment, in which alone the "coming to be" is possible. In her role as the great circle, she is dissolution, space into which all manifestations dissolve. Space which has weight and density from which all beginning is possible.

The circle in the mystery of its wholeness was an outer visualisation of cosmic energy. It became the supreme symbol of two pervading energy forms, the virgin goddess and the rising young Sun in the East.

The goddess was Chacra Rupa, in the form of a circle and the word mandala itself is another word for the Sun as the exploding life-giving force. The triangle, the straight line and the circle, the three aspects of the goddess as the creator, conserver and destroyer do not exist in a linear stream of time, but in a simultaneity. For energy has no past, no future.

In another paradigm of creation the circle when reduced to its ultimate point, was the Bindu. Both male and female, the Bindu was the creative unmanifest. The white dot was lunar and male. The red dot was fiery and female. The merging of the two was the cause of the world. The explosion of the red fiery Bindu, released the Nada the reverberating sound that filled the universe. This Nada or subtle sound was unmanifest and inarticulate. Its movement was upwards. Its main bringing forth or reverberations were *Sristi Bija* – the seed of creation, and *Samhar Bija* or the seed of destruction. From *Sristi Bija* arose the five elements: sky, air, water, fire and earth. Nature and its manifestations including what was made by the hand of man were *Sakala*, held in time, and therefore inherent in it was *Samhar Bija*, the seed of destruction.

It was in the laboratories of the alchemist in the early centuries of this era, that plants, minerals and metals underwent metamorphosis and chemical changes through the medium of fire. These investigations and perceptions lead to explosive insights which in turn nurtured the evolution of tools and craft processes. The probing of physical matter and the fathomless depths of mind touched the roots of a creative essence and was witness to a flowering in music, poetry, art and philosophical enquiry.

The birth of form and the craft needed for its manifestation has always demanded the seer as the explorer into the within of nature and the self, the craftsman as the explorer into tool and physical matter, and the explosion of essence or Rasa, to come together in intimate relationship. This alone creates a milieu where insight, transmutations and transformations and skill as excellence in action, coalesce; that instant is the anonymous birth of the creative, of the presencing of form, of luminous revelation.

Sankhya provided a philosophy based on a primal cause, an observation of nature, of behaviour of mass and the potency of energy, a hard material view of origins. It was an approach to the pre-manifest and the instant of "coming to be", the revelation of form.

Tantra with its links to the earth, to magic and to its attitudes grounded in minute observation of inner and outer phenomena, as well as its concern with transformation of energy, within the mind and in the crucibles of the laboratory, gave to the arts a vocabulary of colour, sound, space and density – the ingredients of all form.

Skill arose out of the relationship of the creator to his tools and his material, and his capacity for unwavering attention; insight was essence, the awakening, the igniting, the flowing of the stream of perception. This was true in the monumental arts of India. It was equally true of rural woman engaged in her vrata mandala paintings as energy held drawings of the cosmos on floor and wall.

We are back to a fundamental question, if insight and skill are the warp and woof of the creative, in what is the surfacing?

Can one place an imponderable question such as this on ground of the mind without "ripple or recoil, without any movement from or towards, without seeking answer or permitting the past to intrude? Can one permit the question to unfold its complexity, in its own time and space, make luminous its condensed meaning, release the energy held within it?"

The weight and depth and intensity of the question and the holding of it as an embryo in the mind gives tone and muscle to attention, as also determines the extent to which the undifferentiated ground as the universal is revealed. Man has to relentlessly discover this instrument and its vocabulary.

In the last few years I had the privilege of discussing the problem of the nature of insight and skill with Krishnamurti, one of the most profound minds of our age. During discussion one perceived that the movement of insight was a voyage into time, into the past, limitless. The awakening of insight demanded a seeing, listening, which was the awakening of all the senses simultaneously, so that, in that instant, fragmentation ended. The senses flowing simultaneously was a state of flowering, an awakeness, in which the barriers of the within and the without cease. A state which perceives object, the "what is", with all the senses alive, apprehends objects without that perception being held or transformed by object. And so the flow of seeing, listening, continues without obstacle to inhibit it or give it direction.

"This stream of perception having no banks and no intention is an instant of eternity. For in it there is no before nor after." There is an instant to instant presencing, a making manifest and an ending, within a stream uncluttered by distortion of memory, of time as past or future. There is only attention, an instant prior to the "coming to be" of form from the universal ground the pre-manifest.

Unlike other instruments of mind which turn to the store-house of personal or racial knowledge as memory, exploring, discarding, analysing to find a perception without bondage; insight does not search. It sees the within and the without of object, grasps it as a whole. This seeing is the creative ground that makes luminous and reveals. In this state the holistic is the perception. Out of this arises insight and skill in action. Insight and skill moving together and the environment providing tools and material resources, manifestation and the presencing of the creative is inevitable.

The Genesis of a Nation

Hugh Desmond Hoyte

As we observe the 150th Anniversary of the arrival of the first immigrants from India in our country, it is fitting and eminently appropriate that we should have with us Vice President Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma and Mrs Sharma and so large and distinguished a delegation from India to share with us the joy of these celebrations.*

On behalf of the Government and people of Guyana, I extend to them all a warm welcome and hope that their stay among us will be a most enjoyable.

A century and a half ago they came, the first batch of immigrants to this country from the subcontinent of India. In the words of the poet, Mahadai Das,

> They came in ships
> From far across the seas
> Britain, colonising the East in India
> Transporting her chains from Chota Nagpur
> and the Ganges Plain.
> Westwards came the Whitby
> Like the Hesperus…
>
> Some came with dreams of milk and honey
> riches.
> Others came, fleeing famine
> And death.
> All alike they came…
>
> Crossing dark waters.
> Brahmin and Chammar alike.
> They came
> At least with home in their heart.

---

*Based on the address on the occasion of Indian Heritage Day (5 May 1988), Georgetown, Guyana.

Of the four hundred and fourteen who boarded the "Whitby" and "Hesperus" at Calcutta to begin that historic voyage, three hundred and ninety-six arrived. These were the forerunners. In subsequent years, hundreds of thousands crossed the *kala pani* bound for these shores. Some came voluntarily; many were coerced; but an ugly motif of trickery and deception haunts the story of their recruitment. The British commercial house in Calcutta, asked about the possibility of obtaining such workers, had no qualms about replaying as follows: "We are not aware that any greater difficulty will present itself in sending men to the West Indies, the natives being perfectly ignorant of the place they go to or the length of the voyage they are undertaking."

Well might the firm give those assurances, for it had already gained experience in this dubious business, having successfully ensnared labourers for work on plantations in the island of Mauritius.

It is unlikely that the workers did not give serious thought to the risks they were taking. But given the intolerable pressures of unemployment, landlessness and famine, their options were very limited. Perhaps, the most difficult decision they had to make was to cross the seas; for, apart from the hazards, this act had serious social and psychological implications for them. And yet none of this prepared them for the harsh realities awaiting them at the journey's end.

The people of India were no stranger to sea voyaging and migration. From earliest times they had sailed the seas to establish cultural contacts, to explore and to trade. As far back as the millennium before Christ, their ships were a familiar sight in the ports of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea; and they developed maritime intercourse with the Mediterranean, South East Asia and the islands of the Pacific. As K.M. Panikkar, the distinguished Indian historian and diplomat, wrote, "The expansion of Indian culture and influence both in Central Asia and in the south east, towards the countries and islands of the Pacific, is one of the momentous features of the period immediately preceding the Christian era." Even before that era, people from India had been migrating to distant lands; but around the first century A.D., the colonizing impulse gained momentum and Indian immigrants settled in the countries that we know today as Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Burma, Thailand, Kampuchea (Cambodia), Vietnam and Taiwan. Wherever they went they took the art and culture of India with them.

But the journeys which were undertaken in 1838 had a special historical significance: they represented, as far as we know, the first entry of people from the subcontinent of India into the New World of the western hemisphere. These pioneers did not come as cultural ambassadors, explorers, traders or colonisers. They were not indeed "immigrants" in the popular sense of that word, for there was no intention on their part to settle permanently in this country. They were migrant workers, who had come to hire out their labour for a specified period of time after which they confidently expected to return home. They had been led to believe that under the indenture to which they had subscribed but which they hardly ever understood, they would enjoy high wages, good working conditions and an opportunity to return to India if not in affluence, at least with a reasonable financial competency. The hidden reality was that they were going to be engorged by a system that was harsh, cruel and unconscionable – a system not far removed from slavery and rightly so criticised by public opinion in India and elsewhere. In fact, while some did make that return journey to their native land, very many were unable to do so; they put their roots down and, for them, this country became home.

They had been brought here by the sugar plantation owners to satisfy the gargantuan appetite of the industry for an abundant supply of cheap labour. This labour had formerly been provided by Africans abducted in their homeland, transported in chains across the Atlantic and forced into a system of slavery. That system was about to end. Within three months of the arrival of the first batch of Indian immigrants, the emancipation of the slaves would be finally completed with the end of the apprenticeship system. The planters had correctly forecast that the freed slaves would not wish to be further associated with the scene of their former degradation and would withdraw their labour from the sugar estates; and they concluded that an alternative source of cheap labour was the answer to such a problem. The freed men did indeed withdraw their labour and began to build their own social and economic structure outside the pale of the plantation system.

The ensuing scarcity of labour seemed to convince the planters that a policy of immigration was necessary to save the plantations from collapse. Their point of view was endorsed in an 1842 House of Commons Report which stated "that one obvious and most desirable mode of endeavouring to compensate for this diminished supply of labour is to promote immigration of a fresh labouring population, to such an extent as to create competition for employment". Two years before, Schomburgk had recommended "unlimited and free" immigration, as he put it, "to rescue British Guiana from rapid decline".

Indeed, so severe was the labour shortage that by 1850 the Combined Court of the colony was asking for "a large influx of immigrants without delay". The metropolitan and colonial administrations, sympathetic to the interests of sugar, needed little persuasion. Africa being closed to them as a major source of supply, and other sources having proved to be inadequate or unreliable, the planters were confirmed in their view that it was necessary to turn to Asia and particularly India.

Indian immigration to British Guiana looms large in the history of the period, but it was only the most visible element in a trend that began first in anticipation of emancipation and, subsequently, in consequence of it. The indentureship system was of wider scope. Under it, between 1834 and 1838 over one thousand immigrants arrived in the country from the British Isles, Madeira, Malta, France, and Germany. In the decade immediately following the arrival of the first batch of Indian immigrants and the end of the apprenticeship system, the planters brought in labourers from West Africa, particularly Sierra Leone, from Portuguese Cape de Verde and from the United States of America. Their energetic agents, promising attractive conditions, recruited thousands of immigrants from the West Indies also, particularly Barbados.

When the first batch of Chinese immigrants arrived in 1852, the heterogeneous character of our country's population had been firmly and irreversibly established. People of different races and different cultures had been brought together at the behest of sugar. This country was to become their home. Somehow or other, they were going to have to learn to live together in this new homeland.

But what was happening in this country at the time was part of "the vast demographic revolution", as Eric Williams described it, that was taking place in the wider Caribbean. India was to become the principal, but not the sole, source of immigrant labour. In their thirst for workers, the plantation owners did not place upon themselves any constraint of race or geography. Thus into the Caribbean flowed immigrant Chinese, Madeirans, Europeans, Annamites from Cochin China (now part of modern Vietnam), Javanese, Japanese and some other racial groups. Albeit in circumstances that we now look back on with distaste, the conditions were being set for the emergence of a unique socio-cultural grouping that was not exclusively Amerindian, African, Asian or European, but was one that would derive its peculiar characteristics from a mingling and cross-fertilization of all these cultures. These various peoples would over time have to undergo a process of self-realization and strive, out of their diversity, to create for themselves and their region a specific identity.

The history of the world could be written around the theme of the migration of peoples. India itself is a product of migration. Successive waves of migratory peoples made their way into the Indian subcontinent, some peacefully, some by force of arms: Medians and Aryans; Greeks and Bactrians; Parthians and Scythians; Kushans, Turks and Mongols. They encountered the indigenous Dravidians; they settled;

they interacted with and influenced one another; and the country absorbed all of them, and with them, their arts and culture. Yet, out of its enormous and complex diversity of race, culture and religion, India was able to achieve a synthesis that has manifested itself in the emergence of a national culture, a national ethos and a national identity. As Jawaharlal Nehru put it:

> The diversity of India is tremendous; it is obvious; it lies on the surface and anybody can see it. It concerns itself with physical appearance as well as with mental habits and traits. There is little in common, to outward seeming, between the Pathan of the North-West and the Tamil in the far south. Their racial stocks are not the same...; they differ in face and figure, and food and clothing, and, of course, language.

And yet, he noted that a dream of unity had always occupied the mind of India. "That unity", he explained, "was not conceived as something imposed from outside, a standardisation of externals or even of beliefs. It was something deeper and, within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practised and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged." India has shown that ethnic and cultural heterogeneity within a country is not a bar to the development of genuine national pride and national solidarity. That lesson could not have been lost on the immigrants for, whatever material goods they might have lacked, they brought with them the wisdom of India, which Hegel described as one of that country's desirable and desired treasures.

We Guyanese are, by and large, all descended from immigrant stock. With the exception of our Amerindian fellow-citizens, whose ancestors migrated here thousands of year before, our forefathers were brought here primarily to satisfy the needs of the plantations. Thus, sugar had planted in our country Europeans, Africans, Indians, Madeirans, Chinese, and other races, who joined the indigenous Amerindians to form the country's population. Whether we knew it or not, our destiny was inextricably interlinked; and we were locked into a future which we could influence and shape, but from which we could not altogether escape.

Our history has been a search for common ground, not merely between the various ethnic groups, but even within those groups. Among the Indians themselves, for example, there were divisions in the early days. Inherited problems of caste prejudice (and therefore colour prejudice) had to be resolved; so too with differences dividing Hindu, Muslim and Christian immigrants from the subcontinent. "These differences", one historian observed, "were sufficiently deep-seated to create friction among the several categories (of Indian immigrants) which sometimes resulted in violent clashes". But then differences constituted the dominant social characteristic in the country as a whole from the beginning: differences of ethnicity, language, physical appearance, religion, culture, class and colour.

Thus, the classic conditions existed for the application of the imperial principle of "divide and rule" or, as Nehru described it, "balance and counterpoise". He defined this as "the creation and protection of vested interests bound up with British rule, a policy of balancing and counterpoise of different elements and the encouragement of fissiparous tendencies among them". This principle was deployed with consummate skill. The various ethnic groups were manipulated, pitted against one another, and neutralised. The resulting situation of mutual distrust was calculated to forestall any unity of action by them to protect and promote their common interests. A European Administrator-General, displaying a keen understanding of the principle, wrote as follows in 1851: "Our population consists of various races with conflicting feelings and prejudices, without a common bond of union – and herein lies one great element of our security", by which, of course, was meant the security of the exploiter over the exploited and not of the society as a whole, for this as a concept hardly as yet existed.

But if we were to survive, break loose from the shackles of our exploitation, lift ourselves above the status of inferiority to which we had been relegated, and recover our dignity as human beings, we had to forge that very "common bond of union" which the Administrator-General so shrewdly identified as being lacking. A colonial polity was not a milieu which made such an objective easily attainable; and yet, over time, we showed we possessed the intelligence and the capacity to subordinate the artificial differences of ethnicity and culture to a larger common interest. And we did find common ground on which to rally.

It was difficult at first for us to relate to one another, for there were such obvious differences of physical appearance, language and culture which tended to confuse. And so, we met in incomprehension and suspicion. Yet, as we underwent the same experience of exploitation and suffering, we learnt in time to respect one another and to co-operate for our self-defence and the pursuit of common objectives. Looking at the results, we now see that we have been able to build a cohesive society and create for ourselves a national identity. We have done so on the basis of the things we had in common, things that served to unite rather than to fragment: our shared historical experiences, our vested interest in and unqualified love for this country, and our deep sense of pride in being citizens of a free and independent Guyana. The road was difficult, and the end long in coming, but the prize was worth the struggle.

The period of slavery, indenture and colonialism in this country was a continuum of inhumanity, oppression and exploitation. But there is little point today in fulminating against past injustices. That would be an unproductive and useless exercise, wasteful of time and energy. Those wrongs are a fact of history that we cannot change. What is important is that we have triumphed over those harrowing conditions that cramped our lives. We have now achieved a status of freedom and dignity that facilitates the continuous expansion of our intellectual horizons while, at the same time, encouraging the full and rounded development of our individual personalities through the equal opportunities afforded by a society founded on mutual respect and tolerance among individuals and pride in the nation as a whole. All of this, thanks to the courage, fortitude and sacrifices of our forefathers. Thanks also to our own efforts in more recent times, modelled on the examples which they set.

We leave the past behind us with its cargo of pain and inhibitions. We must now look to the future. As that great Indian scholar and philosopher, Dr Radhakrishnan, remarked,

> The future is the more important thing. We are able to see further than our predecessors since we can climb on their shoulders. Instead of resting content with the foundation nobly laid in the past, we must build a greater edifice in harmony with ancient endeavour and modern outlook.

If we look back at all, it must be to draw lessons from the past that will protect us from repeating old mistakes; that will give us a better appreciation of the amplitude of our achievements so far, and of what can still be attained; that will inspire us to continue to work in love and in service, without reservation, for the development and progress of this great country of ours.

Ours is a wonderful and inspiring story of the triumph of the human spirit in the face of seemingly insuperable odds. We must celebrate that story by researching our history meticulously and recreating it in all its richness and excitement so that our children, in particular, might know how precious and how marvellous is our heritage as the citizens and possessors of Guyana. As Rajkumarie Singh wrote:

> To know is vital –
> urgent is it to set down the struggles
> for the young, the unborn, must never bow their heads
> believing that theirs offered naught to the fight.

But she understood so well the futility of anger and hate and also the dangers inherent in the negative and uncreative use of history.

Speaking generally about the West Indies, C.L.R. James said, "When a nation comes into the world, it brings something new, and I think that there are two things we have brought: firstly, a very critical and creative attitude to intellectual and historical development, to sport, and writing; and, secondly, a tremendous passion for a sense of national development, national recognition, but without the violent… hatred (for former imperialist masters) which usually accompanies it. I think that is part of West Indian consciousness." It is, I am sure, part of the Guyanese consciousness of our Guyanese identity which, without exception, comprehends all of the ethnic and cultural components of our past. We all have today an equal place in this country without any residue of old bitterness. And so Rajkumarie Singh's instinct is essentially right when, even as she encourages us to rediscover and set down our history for the new generation, she at the same time cautions:

> yet write sagaciously – to inspire, rather than burden
> down with complexities of inferiority and hate
> lest they too succumb to the evil of violating
> human dignity!

We must use our history as the basis for bringing up our children to be confident and self-reliant; to respect themselves and to respect one another; and to know, to love and to serve Guyana.

As the French historian Braudel remarked, "All sciences are constantly redefining and re-examining themselves. Each historian is necessarily aware of the changes which he himself must precipitate, however involuntarily, in a flexible profession which evolves of itself because of the weight of new knowledge, new aims, new enthusiasms…"

New knowledge, new aims, new enthusiasms. New knowledge arising from a more rigorous and methodical research into, and interpretation of, our history. New aims to recreate that history and invest it with the splendid dignity which rightly belongs to it. New enthusiasms reflecting themselves in a missionary commitment to our young people: to help them to read our history aright and appreciate the monumental achievements of our ancestors; to invest them with a sense of pride in being Guyanese because they know that they are descended from men and women of heroic stature who wrought mighty deeds; to imbue them with an understanding of the essential truth that they are, in the words enshrined in the preamble to our Constitution, "the proud heirs of the indomitable spirit and unconquerable will of our forefathers who by their sacrifices, their blood and their labour made rich and fertile and bequeathed to us as our inalienable patrimony for all time this green land of Guyana".

Over the years, a subtle but creative interplay between the actions and activities of the various races and groups began imperceptibly to forge that "common bond of union" which was indispensable to our survival and our eventual freedom. There was often no discernible link between those actions and activities. We cemented our solidarity sometimes without even realising it; sometimes we did so deliberately, but only for a specific purpose and a particular occasion. But, in the end, as a matter of conscious and coherent policy, we began to see more clearly what was required of us in the pursuit of our common interests.

There are four impulses, I believe, that were associated with our progression, as a people, towards mutual respect and understanding, co-operation, social cohesion and national solidarity. The first was our common history of exploitation, suffering and struggle; the second was our grasp of the fact that we not only produced the economic goods in this country, but that our labour – sheer manual labour – built and maintained the physical infrastructure which supported the economy; the third was our knowledge that we produced the food that sustained the population; and the fourth was our shared aspiration for a better life, free from the prevailing social injustices, in conditions of political freedom. All of these imponderable yet powerful factors promoted inexorably a community of interests among us, even though this was not necessarily understood at the time.

The greatest legacy our ancestors have left us was the example of their refusal to surrender their humanity and tamely acquiesce in oppression and injustice. The African slaves waged a major war of liberation in 1763 under Cuffy; but, as Robert Moore remarked, "it was not that the African slaves withdrew their acceptance of the system some time in 1762 or 1763, but that they had never accepted the system all along". Witness the uprisings and other upheavals in 1731, 1733, 1734, 1741, 1749, 1752, 1762, culminating in that grand effort in 1763; and the later insurgencies in 1795 and 1823, among others. They had waged a continuing war against the slave system, sometimes direct, sometimes indirect by ingenious acts of sabotage. They never gave up.

Similarly, the Indian immigrants, from the time of their arrival, continuously asserted their human dignity. They protested against low wages poor housing, insanitary conditions, unjust and oppressive practices and a host of other grievances, in every way they could. They feigned illness; they escaped from the plantations; they frequently invoked the law and took their cases to the magistrates, though not with conspicuous success in a system not designed to ensure such success. But they also took direct action, and strikes and other forms of industrial action were frequently employed. In many cases strikes were accompanied by acts of arson, destruction and violence and also by peaceful demonstrations which were deemed by the authorities to be rioting. These manifestations of disaffection with the system frequently brought out the armed police and the military to restore order. During labour disturbances at Pln. New Devonshire Castle in 1872, five Indian indentured workers were shot dead; 15 died at Rose Hall estate in 1913. But these struggles were not in vain for the Rose Hall incident sparked an official inquiry which formed part of the developments that led to the abolition of the indentured system in 1917. Not the least important factor in its termination was the pressure of public opinion in India itself.

Indentureship was "a despotism of sugar", as Des Voeux described it. He was well placed to assess its true nature for, as magistrate, he had to administer the harsh, comprehensive and tightly drawn labour laws that underpinned and reinforced the system. Drawing on his experience, he wrote as follows:

> The law had been so framed and its net covering all possible offences was woven so closely, that not even the smallest peccadilloes could escape its meshes; so that, in fact, the manager, whenever a labourer annoyed him, had almost always in reserve some trifling or other legally defined offence on which he could bring a complaint involving fine or imprisonment with hard labour, or both.

But the worst forms of tyranny arose from the virtually unlimited power of the planter over the labourers, which enabled him and his agents to administer sanctions outside the scope of the law: to whip them, to dock their pay and to humiliate and oppress them in every conceivable manner.

But the end of the system of indenture did not mean an end to the terrible conditions to which the workers on the sugar estates were subjected. Their multifarious grievances remained, and they intensified their struggle against their continued exploitation. This continuing agitation was cogent evidence of their dissatisfaction with their working conditions; but, in a deeper sense, it opened up a more generalised assault on the colonial system. Workers of all categories felt intuitively that the plantation system was but a manifestation of the inherently exploitative nature of the colonial system. The seeds of an anti-colonial sentiment, which in later years grew into the anti-colonial movement, were being sown.

The increased agitation by the immigrant workers on the sugar estates was thus an aspect of a more general development taking place in the country. Workers were beginning to understand the importance of concerted action and their militancy was tending to express itself in a more disciplined and a more organised fashion. In fact, a labour movement was emerging and the idea of loyalties and interests that transcended ethnic and cultural barriers was gaining ground. When the police opened fire on Indian strikers at Ruimveldt in 1924 killing four and wounding several others, the city of Georgetown, populated predominantly by Black workers reacted angrily by rioting; and a newspaper report of the day's events said, "three-fourths of the populace of Georgetown seem to have gone stark, staring mad". What was being witnessed was the emergence of working class solidarity that was going to be a potent influence in breaking down the barriers of race and culture and promoting the idea and practice of national unity.

The burgeoning of overt cohesiveness among the working people was stimulated by the remarkable labours of Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, the Black worker who, in 1919, founded British Guiana Trade Union, the first trade union in the country and the first trade union in the British colonial empire. Critchlow, despite enormous difficulties, not the least of which was the bitter opposition of the planters and the colonial administration, made heroic attempts to organise the sugar workers. He made repeated representations on their behalf and his Union launched a vigorous campaign to demand that Indian workers be paid "on an equal basis with other labouring people of other races in the colony", and not at the prevailing lower rates. He was very popular with the plantation workers who referred to him affectionately as the "Black Crosby", a team traditionally associated in their minds with concern for their welfare.

Indian leaders soon followed Critchlow's example. In 1937, Ayube Edun founded the Manpower Citizens Association and by 1939 had won recognition for his union as the collective bargaining agent for the sugar workers. Many trade union leaders of Indian ethnicity arose and the workers' movement was consolidated in 1940 with the formation of a national body, the British Guiana Trade Union Council.

And so the labour movement was born. It was a powerful instrument in crystallizing the concept of unity among the masses of our people and in promoting the idea that they had a community of interests in which racial factors were irrelevant. Thus, workers in the country began to acknowledge wider considerations than mere ethnicity. This development had a dramatic effect in strengthening co-operation among the people of the country and in stimulating a sentiment of nationalism. It reinforced the respect of Indians for one another since it destroyed the last remnants of prejudice based upon a memory of the caste system. As the social scientist Jayawardena noted, the disappearance of caste prejudice owed much to the fact that trade unionism "impressed on the labourers themselves that their most important rights and duties derived from their status in the labour organization"; and the labour movement provided the forum in which all workers, regardless of racial or culture differences, could meet in a spirit of mutual respect and solidarity to pursue their common interests.

The idea gradually developed among us that we were no longer here on sufferance, that this country belonged to us because we had built it with our hands, our sweat, and our blood. The vast and intricate system of drainage, irrigation and transportation canals; the dams and revetments; the river and sea defences; the roads – all of these major constructions which were the essential infrastructure of the sugar plantations had been originally built by the sheer physical labour of the slaves. With the advent of Indian immigration, the indentured labourers joined in the construction of new works and in the maintenance of the old. Together, then, we built the village *kokers*, the access roads and the coastal roads. We opened up the trails through the hinterland. We ventured into the forests to fell the logs and open up a new industry. We braved the turbulent waters of the rivers and rapids to win the gold and diamonds from the mining areas. In the process, many of our ancestors were prematurely exhausted, many were crippled, many paid with their lives.

In the early days,

> Something we were withholding made us weak
> Until we found out that it was ourselves
> We were withholding from our land of living,
> And forthwith found salvation in surrender.

The moment it dawned upon us that we had built this country and that it was nothing without us, we realised that we had a vested interest in it and we came to love it in a very special way. We surrendered ourselves to the land and the land became our own – to love, to develop and to defend. In these circumstances, we could no longer be content with being second class citizens. We were no longer prepared to toil while others reaped "the golden increment of bursting fruit". We realized that we would never be the beneficiaries of the product of our own labours until we became the effective owners and masters of this country which we had created. And we knew instinctively that this was an objective to which we had to turn our combined efforts. This was an electrifying idea, for it implied political independence. The conditions were ripe, the population responded with enthusiasm, and the tendency towards national consolidation gained momentum.

We very early understood the importance of food self-sufficiency and food security, and were at one on this issue. In this, our ancestors have provided us with valuable lessons that are both timely and relevant. To the plantation owners, agriculture meant growing sugar for export. To our ancestors, it meant producing food for the people of this country.

The post-emancipation period saw the development of the village movement by the former slaves and the establishment of a strong village economy based on diversified agriculture. The early reports of the Inspector of Villages recorded high volumes of food production and the export of large quantities of ground provisions, plantain, arrowroot, coffee and corn to the West Indian islands. But the sugar barons would brook no rival near the throne. They were not prepared to allow the development of a thriving village economy which would reduce the pool of cheap labour available to the estates. And so they set out methodically to destroy it. They had legislation passed to impede the establishment of communal villages, the form of social organization preferred by the former slaves. They let the flood waters from the estates on to the village lands, and villages became "stagnant sheets of water". They let their cattle loose on to the village farms to destroy them. The Inspector of Villages referred with monotonous regularity in his annual reports to the "destruction of provisions, fruit trees, cattle and stock". But as A.R.F. Webber noted in his Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana, these farmers were providing an indigenous food supply to the population at affordable prices. More than that, in his words, they "were in truth laying the foundations of a thriving peasantry on their own freeholding, and raising a food supply which has carried the colony from crisis to crisis in more than one critical period of the colony's history".

Some thirty years after the arrival of the first Indian immigrants, even an unusually liberal-minded European as Des Voeux was sufficiently lacking in discernment to write as follows: "The Indian coolie is not fond enough of agriculture to make any immediate sacrifice to engage in it on his own account." And yet at that date Indian immigrants were already cultivating rice and laying the foundations of the modern rice industry which we know today and which is one of their major contributions to the development of this country. As Mandle remarked, "The early growth of rice represented a rapid process of import substitution in which imports of rice were virtually eliminated within ten to fifteen years of the industry's inception." During the

Second World War, this country ensured the food supply of the West Indian islands, with rice being the major staple exported to them. In periods of crisis during the colonial era and in the current economic difficulties besetting the country, we survived with a large measure of self-respect because we produced substantial quantities of our own food. I believe that our forefathers understood profoundly an important aspect of independence, namely, self-reliance, which we practise in many ways but most significantly by producing and using our own foods and utilizing the resources that are ours. This shared idea and common pursuit of food security has not been the least of the unifying influences in the history of our country.

Over the years, we were at one in the desire for happier conditions of life, for freedom to manage our own affairs, and for political independence for this country which we regarded as being rightly ours. We saw this as the only means by which we could become masters of ourselves, of our country, and of our destiny. The general yearning for independence created a national consensus, increased the momentum of the struggle and underscored its legitimacy and popular character. We prevailed in the end because we had succeeded in forging a "common bond of union among ourselves; and so, when on May 26th, 1966, our country acceded to political independence as a free, sovereign state, we chose a motto that was as significant as it was definitive in its message: "ONE PEOPLE, ONE NATION, ONE DESTINY".

What is it we are celebrating on the 150th Anniversary of the arrival of the first Indian immigrants in this country? We, the people of Guyana, are recalling with pride the fact of their arrival in this country. We are paying tribute to them for the wonderful example they have given us of faith and fortitude, of hard work and sacrifice, of courage and steadfastness. And we are giving thanks for the bountiful blessings which this country has received from their manifold and creative endeavours. They brought with them the "treasures of wisdom" to which Hegel referred and which, in subtle but pervasive ways, profoundly influenced our national life. Their wisdom manifested itself in their adaptability and their resilience. And they found, like Tagore, that

> when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies
> break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks
> are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.

That wisdom, as ancient as India itself, they bequeathed not only to their progeny, but to all Guyanese. It taught us the virtue of tolerance, respect for other people's customs and the importance of living harmoniously with our fellowmen. The practice of this virtue, as a moral obligation, strengthened the fabric of our national life, influenced profoundly the process of social cohesion, and helped us to evolve our own way of life and put it on an enduring foundation. Today, we acknowledge and honour all these splendid contributions they made to the growth and development of Guyana.

Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking in the Constituent Assembly (Legislative) of India in 1947, paid a fittingly handsome tribute to Indians who had emigrated from India over the years. He said:

> The history of Indian immigration abroad, including that of the humblest of those who went from India, reads almost like a romance. How these Indians went abroad! Not even citizens of a free country, working under all possible disadvantages, yet they made good wherever they went. They worked hard for themselves, and for the country of their adoption. They made good themselves, and the country they had gone to also profited.

But there came a time when the immigrants had to make a choice between Mother India and the country in which they had put down their roots, and in which they had brought up their children and worked without stint so that the country could grow in strength and prosperity. In the following year, Nehru faced this question squarely and gave the answer which we would all accept as being the correct one. "Now these Indians abroad, what are they?" he asked. "Are they Indian citizens? Are they going to be citizens of India or not? If they are not, then our interest in them becomes cultural and humanitarian not political. That interest of course remains." And speaking some years later in the Lok Sabha in a Foreign Affairs debate, he returned to the theme and explained the position in definitive terms: "If they adopted the nationality of the country", he said, "then they should be treated as citizens with all the rights of citizenship. In which case we have no concern with them. Sentimental concern there is, but politically they cease to be Indian nationals."

Thus, when we in Guyana won our independence in 1966, all of us in this country, regardless of where our forefathers came from, became citizens of this great Republic. We are all equal members of a plural, yet cohesive Guyanese society. I use the word "plural" to indicate that our society is made up of people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds; and yet it is cohesive in that we all have the same right and the same duties; we respect one another as fellow-citizens; and we acknowledge the beauty, validity and relevance of all cultural manifestations and regard them as our common national heritage. The accident of ethnic origin is not deemed by us to be inconsistent "with full consciousness of being Guyanese first and foremost". And we fully understand that all citizens of Guyana, whatever their ethnic or cultural background, have made their own contribution in their own way to the building of this country, and that it belongs in equal measure to all of us.

Today, all Guyanese stand together with their fellow-citizens whose forefathers came from India in commemorating the important landmark of the 150th Anniversary of the arrival of the first of those pioneers. The British official had remarked in 1841 that there was no "common bond of union" between us. He was, I concede, right at that time. But, arising out of the common struggle, achievements and aspirations of our forefathers, we have forged an enduring bond of union. So, on this historic day, whatever our origin, we pause to reflect on, to admire and to applaud the contribution which the Indian immigrants and their descendants have made to the development and progress of our country; and we do so not as separate, fragmented and divided groups, but as a nation.

And how extraordinary that contribution has been in every field of endeavour! I cannot put it better than the way in which Ian McDonald expressed it in a recent viewpoint over the local radio; and he has done it so beautifully that I do not have the heart to compress the quotation:

> In the case of the Indian indentured people, it is not only the long list of outstanding personalities emerging over the years to make their contribution domestically, regionally and internationally which is important, though the list is immensely impressive. What would Guyana be without those thousands of Indians who have played outstanding roles in the politics, the unions, the professions, the public service, the trade and business, the arts and culture, the intellectual development, and the religion of this country? It would be invidious to single out names, but perhaps I might put it this way: in politics, in law, in medicine, in the arts, in education, in business, in religion, in every walk of life, there have been more than one equivalent to what Rohan Kanhai is to cricket.
>
> But it is not only the personalities. It is also the richly variegated culture which has helped to form the fabric of the nation and enhance all our lives whether we are Indian or not. What would Guyana be without Indian customs, Indian religion and its age-old practices and philosophy, Indian festivals and holy days, Indian clothes and jewellery, Indian food and spices,

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> Indian dance and song and music, Indian architecture, Indian learning, Indian attitudes to life and death inherited from centuries ago? Without this myriad of legacies, contributed out of a great culture, it would simply not be Guyana at all.

We, the people of Guyana, today salute those first immigrants from India who, from such unpromising beginnings, called forth from their ancient heritage an inner strength that enabled them to survive, preserve their essential humanity, overcome their cruel circumstances, and transform their humble lives into an epic assurance that the collective human spirit can never be crushed and will always triumph over injustice and oppression. We owe them a debt of gratitude. We can only repay that debt by ensuring that we create and maintain in this country conditions of peace, freedom and equity, and provide ever-widening opportunities for our moral, cultural and intellectual growth and for advancing the material well-being of all our people.

We have travelled a long, difficult and hazardous road together. We have shared pain, misery and suffering. Arising from the workings of the peculiar machinery which brought us unexpectedly together, we have had our inevitable conflicts, dissensions and misunderstandings. But we have overcome these things and they are now behind us. Whether we are descended from master or from bondsman; whether we trace our roots back to Africa, India, China, Europe, or the Madeira Islands; or whether we are of the Amerindian people, whose ancestors originally settled here millennia ago, this is our country and there is an equal place here for all of us. If they could be with us today, our ancestors would be happy, and feel that their sacrifices were not in vain, as we Guyanese stand together on this historic occasion and, in Derek Walcott's lines, say to the whole world of this great country of ours:

> Its racial quarrels blown like smoke to sea,
> From all that sorrow, beauty is our gain.
>
> The beauty of a rich, diverse and colourful heritage.
>
> The beauty of a society so vital in its ethnic and cultural varieties, yet so harmonious in its functioning.
>
> The beauty of a people creative, energetic and confident, proudly affirming their identity and asserting their dignity.
>
> And the beauty of a free and independent Guyana which, in

> the words of our Constitution, "our forefathers.........by their sacrifices, their blood and their labour made rich and fertile and bequeathed to us as our inalienable patrimony for all time".

And so as we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the arrival of the first Indian immigrants in Guyana, even as we recall the sorrow that blighted their lives, a sorrow that was common to most of our ancestors, we yet rejoice in the inexpressible beauty of the legacy they left us and acknowledge that we can honour their memory in no better way than by individually and collectively committing ourselves with renewed vigour and enthusiasm to the service of this great country of ours.

Exorcizing Technology

Ashok R. Kelkar

ex'orcize v.t. *expel (evil spirit) by invocation etc.; clear of spirits thus.*

The Greeks distinguished between *apistēmē* and *tekhnē*, knowledge and its application – the Baconian aphorism, Knowledge is power, is after all very Greek in spirit.* For the Greeks *tekhnē* comprised both what we today call technology and what we today call art. The Romans as usual followed suit and distinguished correspondingly between *scientia* and *ars*. Only, they started making the tidy-minded distinction between useful arts (precursors to our technology) and not so useful arts (precursors to our art). It is something of an irony, therefore that we moderns would like to make a technological age safe for the arts as if there is some basic incompatibility between technology and art. And even if we don't see any such basic incompatibility between the two descendants of *tekhnē* one may still wonder as to how either of them could be a relevant context for the other. One could no more take the relevance of technology for granted than one could take the relevance of art for granted.

It takes an industrial metallurgist turned historian of technology Cyril Stanley Smith (1975/1981:325) to remind us that "Technology is more closely related to art than to science…art must somehow involve the selection and manipulation of matter…the technologist, like the artist, must work with many unanalyzable complexities…historically the first discoveries of useful materials, machines, or processes…were not done for a perceived practical purpose. Necessity is *not* the mother of invention – only of improvement…; it can only exploit what is already known to exist. Discovery requires aesthetically motivated curiosity, not logic…" Rather than looking upon technology as either a poor relation to science or a poor relation to art one would do well to consider technology in and for itself.

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*This is a slightly revised and enlarged version of a paper presented at the Seminar "The Writer and his Audience in an Increasingly Technological Age," Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi on 21-24 February 1988.

The broad constraints and opportunities that the universe, in particular the immediate environment, offers to Homo sapiens, especially to the consciousness of man, together constitute what Stendhal called "la condition humaine". Man has then gone on to ask questions such as this, Is the earth a paradise or a vale of tears? And does technology make a difference to the way he answers such questions?

Technology is best seen in an ethological perspective – when the first ape-man used a stick or a stone as a tool or cooked his food or dressed a wound or patted clay into shape, he undertook to transform or restructure the environment to meet his needs as distinct from letting or making himself transformed or restructured to meet the demands of the environment. The biotic fact of adaptation takes on a new meaning with the entry of man and his artifacts on the scene.

To begin with, technology is best seen as prosthesis or extension of the channels of sensory input (groping in the dark with a white cane is so much better than doing so with one's bare hands or getting another person to lead you; microscopy or telephony or acid tests or remote sensing are only more elaborate examples) and of the channels of motor output (breaking nuts with stones is so much better than breaking stones with a bare fist; power tools or helicopters or robotry are only more elaborate examples). Technology has certainly enhanced the range and power of man when it comes to mapping things or acting on them – acting with precision if need be.

The restructuring of environment through technology consists in the chemical or physical manipulation of matter, in transforming energy or putting energy to work, and finally in the transfer or storage or retrieval or processing of information as the case may be. (I am of course using the term 'information' here in the cybernetic sense. The manipulation of information may be either for the sake of control – as in a ball-cock or a thermostat – or of sending a message, that is, information in the everyday sense – as in a traffic light or a radar.)

What then is the whole point of this prosthesis or this manipulative activity? There are two sides to the answer to this question. On the one hand, technology establishes a functional order in the midst of dysfunctional or nonfunctional disorder – as when the flow of surface water is regulated and managed. On the other hand, technology could also be seen to afford man a certain operative freedom in the midst of the relentless, unyielding regimen imposed by nature – as when safety devices allow us to function in unsafe situations.

From ecology to economy is but a step. Technology alters the cost and revenue equation of production on the one hand (as when stone implements, the use of metals, the primary machines, domestication of animals and plants, harnessing of energy progressively increased the rate and scope of production). It makes for more efficient consumption on the other hand (as when cooking, clothing, shelter, medicine, storage and transfer of goods, gadgets, devices like writing for the storage and transfer of messages progressively improved standards of consumption).

Thus both supply and demand are accentuated – a surplus of supply is matched with an enhancement of demand. It became practicable to support a larger population and a better standard of living. (Does this mean a better quality of life? But let us not anticipate.)

Technology was of course the most important constituent of "the forces of production" that Marx identified, along with "the relations of production", as the initiators of historical change. A consideration of this will of course lead one into a whole politics of technology.

Considering that some technology, even some kind of advanced technology (think of the drainage system of Mohen-jo-daro) has everywhere and always accompanied man one may reasonably ask why one should then speak of the present age beginning with the Industrial Revolution as the technological age. Technology with a capital t is technology informed by empirical and formal sciences. Early science was often a by-product of technology – think of geometry and alchemy. Early modern science was too busy discovering things to think of inventing practical devices. Indeed it remains true even today that an inventor need not be a scientist or even a technologist but that the inventive turn of mind or the happy accident does not see him through harnessing the invention – that is where modern scientific technology comes in, and in a big way too.

It is a commonplace of history that the pace of change has accelerated so much that more transformations have overtaken man's life in the last couple of centuries than in the whole of the previous history of man. The heat engine, the harnessing of electromagnetism, industrial chemistry, the electronic revolution, animal and plant breeding in a systematic manner, asepsis, inoculation, chemotherapy – each of these has been a turning point in the relevant field. (Scientific technology has invaded sports, pharmacology, cattle breeding, warfare, data-processing – indeed everything, even the reproduction of the human species.) That is what lies at the back of our speaking of the technological age. In so doing we undertake to sort out the effects of scientific technology from the effects of social and political organization. We should not describe as effects of technology what are really effects, say, of the change from the closed society (Gemeinschaft) to the open society (Gesellschaft) or the effects of a capitalistic or socialistic economy or the effects of a libertarian or totalitarian polity. Where formerly the cooking pot was made and sold by a single artisan, now a whole team of designers and engineers and workmen, marketers and distributors is behind the manufacture and sale of a cooking pot.

The implications of technology, all technology, scientific or otherwise, run deeper than one might suspect. Technology is a vital modification of the interface of man and his environment. Technology is no mere survival kit, no mere activator of production and consumption, supply and demand. Rather it affects the very quality of life, and does it profoundly. This is something that is lost sight of in identifying development with technological and economic development.

The contact between man and environment is now mediated by technology ('untouched by human hand') as often as it is immediate and direct ('barefoot', 'naked eye'). The contact can now be disinterested and not merely utilitarian, we have "time to stand and stare". The beauty of landscape and seascape became a commonplace only in 18th century Europe. The sea was no longer merely a source of food and danger. At its most acute this distancing can be alienating, self-estranging. "Vivre? Nos machines le feront pour nous!", we seem to be saying. ("Live? our machines will do it for us!")

Technology facilitates the replacement of sensory impact by sign impact – one takes readings off the dial, clicks the camera rather than take a good look at the Taj Mahal. But then this replacement has vastly enlarged and enriched man's time perspective as well as space perspective. Technology also facilitates the replacement of motor efforts by minimal gestures – a flick of the arm substitutes for a heaving of the hammer, a felicitatory telegram does duty for a warm hug. Paul Valéry (1928/1964 = 226) says, "Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, *hardly more than a sign*." (Emphasis added.) This is prosthesis carried to an extreme.

Technology has often sought to imitate animal adaptive behaviour – not always with success (witness, man's early attempts to fly like birds). Man in turn often tends to imitate his own technology – the handling of technology is a learning experience in itself and this learning is transferred to his ways of understanding and appraising things, of work and play, of making and managing things. Thus, quantification and measurement becomes a habit, buildings and streets are alphanumerically labelled rather than named, pleasure trips and weekends are planned if not scripted rather than improvised, food recipes are tried out and experimented with. It is not for nothing that bureaucracy is often called administrative machinery. At this point it will be worthwhile to point out a basic difference between theoretical science and science applied to technology. A theoretical scientist works hard to arrive at (in Descartes's classic phrase) "clear and distinct ideas" if not clear and distinct algorithms or mathematical procedures. But his interest and excitement ceases the moment his initial icons and imponderables crystallize into formulae that permit him to dismiss details as calculable variables. Not so the technicians. He has a warm and intimate feel, even feeling for detail; he often begins where the theoretical scientist ends – he adopts and adapts the formulae to practical ends. In so doing, however, he may, like the theoretical scientist, strive for elegance as he designs and fashions his artifact. There is an aesthetic component in machine design. Ugliness, drabness, waste, unpleasantness is not inherent in technology – rather is it traceable to human greed, laziness, indifference, and poverty of imagination.

And finally, technology has a moral dimension. Too often technology is made out to be morally neutral – one may make or mar, heal or hurt, construct or destroy with the help of technology. What is lost sight of in so saying is the fact that quite often technology permits us to escape between the horns of a painful moral dilemma – the modern midwife is confident that she may be able to save both the baby and the mother, the spreading of education need not be quantity without quality or quality without quantity or some uneasy compromise. Technical progress consists in the progressive elimination of painful choices. It grants man a partial reprieve so to say from the tragic gap that sunders man's aspirations and dreams from man's capabilities and sufferings. Freedom is as much a suspension of necessity as it is a recognition of necessity.

We have already seen how technology introduces functional order combined with operational freedom and how this enlarges man's moral freedom by narrowing the range of painful moral choices. The combination of orderliness and freedom brings technology close to art. A human artifact – whether the underlying impulse is technical or artistic (or both as in the design arts) – creates an island of a characteristically human order in the natural universe and helps man to feel 'at home' in the world. The artifact participates in the transition from the natural order to the socio-cultural order. By offering man the right mix of orderliness and freedom technology and art constitute the positive side of man's alienation or distancing himself from the world.

Art is by no means above satisfying some of the basic needs of man. Man has stimulus hunger – a prolonged deprivation of stimulus can be shown to be not merely tiresome but profoundly disturbing. Art affords relief from boredom and ennui by structuring time: art can be entertainment. Man has activity hunger – a prolonged spell of inactivity can be unnerving. Art affords relief from inaction by structuring behaviour: art can be work and play. (An artist's sense of work and play can of course be the reverse of other people's sense of work and play.) Man has pattern hunger – prolonged exposure to unpredictable change and a disorderly landscape can be unsettling. Art affords relief from confusion and uncertainty by structuring space: art can be decoration. Finally man has interaction hunger – solitary confinement or the Robinson Crusoe experience can cause acute distress. Art affords relief from surrounding indifference or uninvitingness: art can offer 'human interest'. Art as entertainment, as activity, as decoration, as a source of human interest? This is art at its biotic minimum and at its closest to technology. At this level art interlaces with work no less than leisure and play.

The technological age profoundly changes the context of art. Not only does it bring about a change (as we shall presently see) in the very conditions of artistic production, reproduction, and reception, but it redefines the status of art also. And how? Technology tends to domesticate art. (Does this call for an exercise in wild life preservation? But we mustn't anticipate.)

Although art has always kept man entertained and active and man's environment decorated and full of human interest, it has also managed to distance itself from everyday affairs by associating itself with narrative–making, magic, and rites. In a social environment where religion (sacred ideology) is strong and receptive to art, art has even been assimilated to sacred narrative-making (myth-making), sacred magic (*tantra* in one of its many senses), and sacred rite (ritual). (Royal patronage, let it be borne in mind, partakes of the sacral.) The intervention of technology, even as the intervention of religion that is suspicious of or hostile to art, robs art of this privileged association. Art is turned into a commodity, a piece of consumer goods – at best a luxury item, at the lowest a biotic necessity or a piece of appreciating real estate.

Paradoxically, the technological age has also un-domesticated art – unhoused it from its traditional dwellings. And it has also driven a wedge between homely entertainment, activity, decoration, human interest, that is, art at its minimum and art at its maximum potentiality. Art at its maximum is no longer associated with the sacred (media stars are at best ersatz royalty and do not partake of the sacral) but often tends to develop its own mystique. Not art in association with myth, *tantra*, and ritual but art in association with mere legend, mere fetish, mere cult. A case in point is what may be called "the shivering virgin image of art" that stoutly disowns any demeaning connection of art with the biotic functions of art (entertainment and the rest) and the discursive functions of art (rhetoric, propaganda, ideology – inclusive of sacred ideology or dogma).

The technological age not only domesticates art and un-domesticates art but also redefines the context of art in one other way. Modern science, scientific technology, and the market-oriented economy all share one feature – continual self-renovation. The pace of change is not just a fact of life: it has tended to become a way of life. So this continual self-renovation communicates itself to art – not only the world of fashion (the design arts) but the world of art as such.

As we have already seen technology can support a larger population and an enhanced standard of consumption (inclusive of the demand for art as a biotic necessity). This demographic and economic circumstance has also affected art.

More people are producing more art for more people with more leisure. Quantity is bound to affect quality and not necessarily for the worse. If today's consumers are exposed to quantities of mediocre art or (what is not the same thing) of minimal art, they also have more first-rate art or more maximal art to choose from.

Another consequence of this situation is the change in the recipient's status. Yesterday's recipient was quite likely to be an artist in a small way – singing at work or to the family circle or in the bathroom, for example. Today even with more leisure at his disposal he is more likely to be overawed into passivity. If this trend has affected even sports (television cricket pushing out back-alley cricket or club cricket) it is even more likely to affect art (the bathroom singer going in for piped or canned music whose quality he cannot hope to approach even remotely). I submit, without arguing the point here, that this is not a desirable trend.

The artist's craft or technique, his handling of the vehicle of art, receives a new impetus from technology. The coming of phonography, photography, cinematography, synthetic sound-making, and synthetic image-making (animation film, computer art) – whether used separately or in combination with one another or with more traditional processes—have profoundly affected the artist's craft. Once the initial distrust and fumblings are overcome (Will photography hit portrait painting? Will cinema hit the stage? Isn't cinema simply a canned stage performance?), these new processes are seen to enrich existing possibilities and open up newer ones. To see Shakespeare made into film is a revelation of the cinematic qualities of the Shakespearean theatre. A play like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *King Lear* simply cries out for being remade into film.

The habits of experimentation (rather than conforming to a tradition) and working to a blueprint or script (rather than improvising) that technology has already been seen to instil overtake not only the newer vehicles but often serve to enrich the older crafts too.

The heightened pace of life has put a premium on crispness and despatch over more rambling or leisurely patterns. The duration of a musical or theatrical performance has been curtailed. This brings us to the content or the experiential material of art as distinct from the vehicle. The designing of consumer products has shifted from decorative design to functional design. Abstract art has come into its own without being relegated to the status of an accessory ornament by the side of representational art. (This is true of dance and music no less than painting and sculpture.)

There was a time when long and careful preparation was associated not only with the making of art but also with the making of an artist. Technology enables as well as encourages us to condense or even bypass this process.

The reproduction of art objects, art performances, and art texts has been greatly facilitated by mechanical and electronic devices, and this has led to better conditions of storage, retrieval, and dissemination of art. The art of other ages and other regions is more freely accessible today. Art is accessible to more people now – across divisions of age, sex, class, and education. It can relieve the loneliness and immobility of the aged and the infirm. But accessibility of course doesn't guarantee actual access. Bad money can drive out good. Familiarity can breed satiation if not contempt. As Valéry (1928/1964-228) complains, "One can no longer eat or drink at a café without being disturbed by a concert." Familiarity with the best can also intimidate the novice or the amateur. Access can also suffer from the problem of transplantation. There is an air of unreality about a visit to the museum, a piece of folk theatre transplanted from the fairground to the closed stage facing a city audience, or even a festival of India being staged in a foreign country.

The accent on reproduction also tends to affect the kind of art that gets produced. A preference develops for art that is eminently reproducible, portable, accessible, memorable, sharable. (The older demand for the memorizability of art performances and art texts was a different matter as it depended solely on human memory.) This is of course closely connected with the commodity status of art and the customer being always right.

Finally, the reception of art is also affected by the technological character of the age. The bombardment of the recipient with art may lead to satiation and contempt on his part, as we have already seen. But technology can create conditions that will encourage the privacy and authenticity of reception. Technology enables us "to choose the moment of enjoyment, to savor the pleasure when not only our mind desires it, but our soul and whole being craves and as it were anticipates it" and thus permits the artist's creations "to live again in a vibrant milieu" so that we get the most out of them (Valéry 1928/1964:227). The habits of prosthesis and alienation, however, may carry over into the reception of art and encourage excessive and even careless passivity in the response. The conditions of reception in the technological age will favour identification without involvement in response rather than involvement without identification.

Language is at once a means of communicating with fellow human beings and a means of understanding and interpreting the world, the human world, and oneself – almost a means of shaping experience.

Does the learning experience of handling technology (especially scientific technology) affect language? One may speculate that the nominalized vocabulary of today such as *have a shave* or *give a bath* or *put into operation* or *operationalize* may be evincing a technological bias. The exposure to phonography, photography, and cinematography on the part of the recipient as well as the artist has not only affected the arts of visual and auditory shapes (one can no longer draw the horse galloping conventionally with legs fore and aft) but also the use of language for description and narration (making Zola as well as Robbe-Grillet possible). Literary art can take on photographic or cinematic qualities.

Language, discourse, and along with these the language-using arts (literature, oratory, literary theatre or drama, talking film, song) undergo changes every time technology enters into the reception end. First it was writing (with loud reading), then it was writing with silent reading (discovered apparently by Saint Augustine in the West), then came printing with loud or silent or silent reading, and finally we have listening to speech that is recorded or recorded-and-broadcast or live-broadcast. (Here under broadcasting the loudspeaker and the dissemination of speech records with or without the moving picture are as important as radio and television.) Each of these innovations induced significant changes. Thus, the leisurely backtracking, fastforward, repeating, and the ruminating pause that some of these innovations in the reception process permit have profoundly affected modes of description, narration, analysis, or argument in discourse. Prose came into its own only with their support. The influence of serial dissemination with its interrupted reception on prose fiction and the poleminal tract is well-known.

Literature is relevant to what man needs and what man wants – the needs and wants of the literary artist and of the literary recipient need not coincide, their roles are different. The possibility of a difference between what man needs and what man wants leads to an oft-discussed problem – should they get what they need ('What is good for them') or what they want ('twenty thousand people can't be wrong')? Needless to say, it is always 'them', not 'us' whose needs and wants get discussed!

Here we shall concern ourselves with the needs and wants of the literary recipient (listener or reader) as distinct from the literary artist (the maker of the oral or the written composition).

Once we leave 'them' and 'us' behind and try to get to the bottom of the matter we suddenly realize that the relevance of literature is, to use the philosopher W.B. Gallio's phrase, an "essentially contested concept".

Elsewhere (Kelkar, 'The Meaning of a Poem and the Meaning of Poetry') I have argued that in so far as one seeks to resolve the issue of the relation of the meaning of a poem and the being of a poem one could discriminate between five critical positions (to be precise, five families of critical positions) and then proceed to define the relevance of poetry accordingly. I shall briefly present them here and assume for our present purpose that the definitions could extend to literature other than poetry as well.

Critical hedonism holds that a poem should be in order to delight: the poet is a purveyor, the recipient being a client; the poem is an anodyne that hypnotizes, dealienates the recipient, restoring him to health and reconciliation.

Critical didacticism holds that a poem should be in order to communicate: the poet is a didact, the recipient being a disciple; the poem is a discourse that de-hypnotizes, alienates the recipient, rendering him thoughtful and mindful of his commitments.

Critical formalism holds that a poem should not mean but be a self-sufficient, harmonious whole, the poet is a secular priest, the recipient being an acolyte; the poem is a cult-object that invites him to an orderly world that is meaningful in itself, enriching and refining his taste.

Critical vitalism holds that a poem should be a form of life; the poet is an observant participant or critic of life, the recipient being his interlocutor; the poem is a learning experience that makes him more mature, more open to life, more fully alive.

Critical bipolarism holds that a poem should mean in order to be: the poet is a priest-philosopher, the recipient being his acolyte-interlocutor; the poem is an object that imparts form to life, making him aware that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy.

There are of course other ways of cutting the critical cake. Thus, the five-way division may be crossed by another two-way division based on the issue of the immanence or the transcendence of art.

Critical immanentalism holds that artistic activity and artistic experience is immanent in human activity and experience and hence continuous with non-artistic activity and experience.

Critical transcendentalism holds that artistic activity and artistic experience transcends most other human activity and experience with which it is discontinuous.

Thus, one may conceive of delight (with the critical hedonist) in either immanent or transcendent terms. The concept of form with a French Symbolist is statable in transcendental terms. And so forth.

We have so far conceived of alternate critical positions as competing points of view that can be characterized in pan-human terms. This is certainly not to deny that in any given literary community at a certain historical juncture only some rather than all the conceivable positions may be attested and also that at a certain historical juncture only one or two out of the competing positions may dominate the scene. One could even hazard, say, a positive correlation of hedonism or didacticism with a relatively closed society (Gemeinschaft) and of formalism or vitalism or bipolarism with a relatively open society (Gesellschaft). Again, one could detect in ancient and medieval India a transition from an immanentalist position of the early phase to a transcendentalist position of the later phase (Kelkar, 'Classical Sanskrit Poetics: Then and Now').

But there is more to it than such considerations. One may hold (as Marxists do) that relevance of literature is essentially a historically emergent concept and that any analysis in pan-human terms is at best going to be of a rather limited value. Thus, the literary transition from ascendent early capitalism to decadent late capitalism was to be translated in critical terms as a transition from immanentalist vitalism ('bourgeois realism') to transcendentalist formalism (late Romanticism inclusive of the crypto-Romanticism of the modernists or the New critics). Of course it is not necessary to concede historical materialism in order to accept that the relevance of literature is essentially a historically emergent concept.

Having prepared the ground by showing the relevance of technology (and that of the technological character of the present age) and the relevance of the literary art, we can now proceed to take up our main concern, namely, art (especially the art of literature) in a technological age.

A useful point of departure for this purpose will be the traditional way of stating the social equation of art in relation to the recipient that we come across in both the Indian and the western civilizations. (Perhaps the Chinese and the Islamic civilizations present a comparable picture.) I have in mind the distinction between low art and high art and its implications. (Needless to say low/high ascribe status but do not indicate any appraisal – good/bad art is a distinction that runs independently of high/low art.)

What was the nature of the distinction prior to the technological age? One has to guard oneself against a potential misunderstanding concerning this two-layer stratification of art (inclusive of course of literary art). (Some of the other terminologies are: folk-élite, genre-cultivated, *deśī-mārgī, prākṛta-saṁskrta, lokadharmin-nāṭyadharmīn*. Let it be noted that the last pair of adjectives is applied not to theatrical styles so much as to theatrical techniques that are often co-present but that tend to be associated respectively with low theatre and high theatre.) Low art is for everybody (and that includes the select few also) and high art is for the select few and/or for select occasions (such as a community ritual or festival). Typical societal correlates of low art and high art are: tribal-settled, peasant-trader, rural-urban, profane-sacred, uninitiated-initiates, oral-literate. Repertory items are liable to recategorization – low art of one epoch may be promoted to being high art of a later epoch. There may be borrowal of vehicle techniques or content motifs from low to high art (consider the folk origin of a *deśī* raga like *Bhaṭiyār* in Hindustani classical music) or from high art to low art (consider the endless variations on the *Rāmāyāṇa* and *Bhāgavata* themes in low theatre and narrative art in India; with *Mahābhārata* we probably have a case of a low-to-high transition and then a high-to-low borrowal).

How then does one characterize low and high art as art? The polarity of *lokadharmin-nāṭyadharmin* will serve our purpose here. Actually it is a composite polarity consisting of the distinction between the familiar and the innovative, the regional and the ecumenical, verisimilitude and stylization. But of course these represent only tendencies and not strict rules – thus, a certain degree of stylization is inseparable from all traditional art low or high. Note here that the innovative element is typically not a subversion of the tradition so much as a variation on it. (Novelty or originality as a positive value is an invention of 18th century Western Europe.) Again, the anonymity that one associates today with low art often characterizes high art too (consider classical Indian visual arts). Finally, the virtuosity and allusiveness (or intertextuality) that one associates today with high art often characterizes low art too (consider *bhedik lāvaṇī* or *savāl-javāb* in Marathi folk theatre).

The various caveats we had to enter in characterizing low art and high art as traditionally distinguished (low art is for everybody, high art can be anonymous, and so on) will have given us some indication as to the change in this stratification in the technological age. This is the age of the three 'brows'. Between low art and high art emerges an intermediate stratum – middle art and the stratification is defined afresh. (Other terminologies are: lowbrow-middlebrow-highbrow, folk-popular-élite, *loka-sugama-śāstrīya*. A variant of folk is peasant; a variant of popular is commercial; variants of élite are legitimate, art-. Variants of *loka* are *jana, jānapada*; variants of *sugama* are *lokapriya, janapriya*; a variant of *śāstrīya* is *kalātmaka*.) Low art is for the peasant, the working class, the low income group. Middle art is supposedly for the 'masses', actually it is for everybody – especially the middle income group. High art is associated with the 'educated' in the middle or the high income groups – this is the art that the critical fraternity, the intelligentsia, and the academic student of literature usually consider to be constituting the 'main stream' of art history (or literary history). Borderline interstrata are not lacking – kitsch art is essentially middle art adapting itself to low art recipients, intermediate art is essentially high art adapting itself to middle art recipients, camp art is kitsch art catching the fancy of high art recipients, adapted folk art is low art adapting itself to middle art recipients, preciosity is middle art aspiring to high art status. And so forth.

How does one characterize low art, middle art, and high art as art? True to its linking status middle art shares some features with low art in contradistinction from high art and shares certain other features with high art in contradistinction with low art.

Low and middle art are conformative, accessible; for them the recipient is rarely wrong. High art is often subversive, is often difficult and/or stylized, and never puts the artist in the wrong.

Low art is anonymous, technically simple and intuitive. Middle art and high art are not anonymous, they are technically often complicated and/or self-conscious, the artist is looking for fame (succès fou and/or succès d'estime). (Let it be remembered that 'complicated' isn't the same as 'complex'.)

What is it that brought about or at least stabilized this redefinition of the strata? The presence of technology with a capital t (or scientific technology) tends to encourage the immanentalist position at the expense of the transcendentalist position and in general to blur the line between artistic activity and non-artistic activity. At the same time the technological age accentuates the distinction between art as entertainment, activity, decoration, source of human interest on the one hand and art on the other hand.

Low art culture tends to be associated with hedonism or didacticism; middle art tends to be associated with hedonism or didacticism or vitalism; and high art culture tends to be associated with formalism or vitalism or bipolarism. Thus a Marxist with a lower class or lower middle class background tends to espouse didacticism, while a Marxist with a high art culture background tends to espouse vitalism or, less commonly, even bipolarism.

Another and equally useful point of departure will be the traditional way of stating the linguistic equation of literary art in relation to the literary artist and the literary recipient. I have in mind the set of three closely related distinctions: between prose and verse, between prose and poetry, and between conversational style and incantatory style. In each of these distinctions we are thinking of language either as being closer to its everyday non-literary use or as moving away in the direction of the musical and the symbolic. In any case we are dealing here with a sliding scale.

What was the impact of the technological age on this scale?

In the first place we must realize that this is not a distinction between the absence of style and the presence of style. Rather is it the distinction between a style that dissimulates itself and a style that declares itself. (Comparable is the distinction between decorative design and functional design of consumer products. A modern lamp or serving jar does not try to look like a plant or a bird or a boat.) Again, one could think of this distinction as one between a spare, minimalist style and a rich, maximalist style – the latter bringing literature close to myth, magic, and rite. Myth, magic and rite make use of symbols and so does literature tending towards verse, poetry, incantatory style. Similar remarks apply to the distinction between prose theatre and poetic theatre – *Mṛcchakaṭikam* and *Śākuntalam* is an interesting study in contrast. Is Racine prose theatre in verse or poetic theatre that is less poetic than Shakespeare?

Three things have happened since the coming of the technological age.

First, prose comes into its own. Macaulay's dictum that as civilization advances poetry declines is perhaps to be seen as an oversimplifying exaggeration.

Secondly, the sliding scale of poeticity tends to slide in the direction of prose. What once counted, say, as barely poetic would now count as poetic enough. A relevant observation could be offered – when one translates literature from a Modern Indian language to a Modern European language from the more fully industrialized societies we have to allow for the fact that what sounds good poetry in the original may sound too sentimental or syrupy in the translation – one has to tone it down to make it sound just right. The opposite holds good for a translation in the reverse direction – one has to accentuate the poeticity.

Thirdly, the whole contract between the author and the recipient, which defines the particular literary game that the two are playing at, tends to become more informal and less inflexible. Consequently genres like the novel where it seems that anything goes tend to flourish and the distinction between various literary genres traditionally inherited tends to get blurred. Indeed the distinction between literature and non-literature (journalism, philosophy, criticism) tends to get blurred.

All these three changes betoken a change from a relatively closed society (the 'organic community' beloved of certain literary critics lamenting its loss) in which people need to and are able to count on each other and people strive to be true to their station in life to a relatively more open society in which people demand less of each other and each one strives to be true to himself ('doing one's own thing' is an idiom that would have been incomprehensible to an earlier age). So the literary community feels less sure in drawing upon shared assumptions and symbols and expressions (think of the case of the tell-tale 'the' of modernist poetry described by Rostrevor Hamilton) but more sure in expecting a readiness to meet the other partner half way. (An extreme case of this sort of thing is seen in certain kinds of concrete poetry where the poetic text is hardly more than a do-it-yourself kit for the reader to construct his own poem out of it.)

Such, then, are the facts of literary life in the technological age that compel us to review the relationship between artistic activity and the activity undertaken by a society to ensure the continuity of culture across generations (measures attempting, with varying success, to prevent and cover the 'generation gap'). We simply have to think of art in relation to education. The relationship has two facets – the place of art in education as the object of learning (whether learning to be an artist or learning to be an art recipient) and the place of art in education as the means or medium of learning – the desirable 'side effects' of exposure to art.

Let's consider these two facets in turn before we conclude.

It is very easy to say what education in art appreciation shouldn't be – it certainly shouldn't be the kind that makes the young hate Shakespeare because of the heavy-going overkill nor the kind that leaves you cold (the construe-and-parse approach or the made-easy approach or the sink-or-swim non-approach). Unfortunately it is equally easy to see how education in art cannot be left to chance and family upbringing in these days of mass art (we just loved it as we didn't know anything better) and the technological quest for ready algorithms (there's always someone around to offer instant this and three ways of gaining that) and the loss of shared experience and conventions. All avenues of education informal, non-formal and formal need to be explored. There is no substitute for the slow rumination or *carvaṇā* over the read or the remembered text – audial, audio-visual, and visual media could help only so much. There is every danger of drowning the baby in the bathwater in modern education, and certainly so in education in literary appreciation. (The stronger claim of the media for visual and audial arts is obvious – a good film on a group of paintings or even on a single painting can sometimes be more effective than an illustrated lecture.) The problem of education in art appreciation is in essence the problem of criticism of art writ small. But the very challenges that the critic/teacher faces in this age can be converted into opportunities, to wit –

> the encounter with art is highly private and yet inevitably demands to be shared with others, so if the reader-response is excessively personal the teacher-critic can turn it into a more meaningful involvement, and if the reader-response is excessively shared the teacher-critic can turn it into an exploration of shared tradition;
> the work of art strikes one as quite unique and autonomous and yet quite vulnerable in isolation given its intertextuality, so if the reader-response is excessively myopic the teacher-critic can correct it with an in-depth historical or theory-eliciting enquiry and if the reader-response is too much of the bird's-eye view sort the reader-critic can correct it with a perceptive close reading.

If the reader has some blind spot preventing him from appreciating some classic, that's far less a cause for worry than the reader's having a 'catholic' taste for which the great and the trivial are equally grist to the mill. Discrimination is a more important critical virtue than generosity.

An effective performance as of a repertory play or a musical composition or even poetry which is based on a sound critical interpretation manages to convey it to the audience and thus educates its sensibility. The introduction of avant-garde poetry to middlebrow recipients through good poetry-readings is a case in point.

As for the education of the artist the situation is rather peculiar. There was a time when most civilizations accepted some form of training – typically apprenticeship with a master – as necessary for any artist, even (to an extent) for a literary artist. This continues to be the case for design arts, music, dance, sculpture and to a lesser extent for graphic art, theatre, cinema. There is on the whole a more ready acceptance of the self-taught artist – at any rate with the literary artist this is far more readily accepted, courses in 'creative writing' do raise a snigger. Is any review of the present situation necessary? Have we taken the romantic dogma of inspiration from start to finish to be too sacred to be examined? Are there aspects of the technological age to which the artist is especially vulnerable? What is the role of the critic in respect of the artist? There is a certain venial if irritating ambivalence in the attitude of the practitioner of middle art towards the critic. Even if he has 'won' popularity he hankers for the critic's nod of approval and is pleased if he gets it. But he will not normally admit to either this hankering or to his annoyance with an adverse judgement. Actually the critic's responsibility concerning the artist (many a promising young artist has been stunted by excessive early praise) is a part of his responsibility concerning the recipient. The 'reading public' is quite a different species of creature from the 'circle of the elect' (the French salon or the Left Bank café, the ancient Indian *goṣṭhi*, the 18th century English club). It is certainly a creature of the technological age.

If exposure to technology is (as we have already stressed) a learning experience, so is art. Art is as much a medium of education as language or audiovisual aids or work experience is. (Kelkar, 'Art as Education'.) And I have of course more in mind than the nurturing of a recipient's taste or a practising artist's inward judgement (a great artist can learn from another great artist how *different* he is from the other).

At the same time I must enter a mild caveat – to realize the potential of art as education it is neither necessary nor sufficient to turn art activity into a secular religion as critics have tended to do from the time of Mathew Arnold (who was not guilty of supposing it is).

To draw up a balance sheet of the artistic culture of contemporary India after the Indian Prabodhan (1820-1920, misguidedly called the Indian Renaissance), on the debit side are: an etiolated theatrical tradition (Maharashtra and Bengal being the honourable exception thanks to the Prabodhan); an overblown kitsch in the design arts, middle cinema, visual arts; poor dissemination of visual art sense in the middle class, the nouveau riche, and the uprooted peasant or tradesman; a poorly developed sense of humour (even Sanskrit literature is not an honourable exception); and on the credit side: traditional low and high design arts of a high order thriving or gasping for life as the case may be (Maharashtra being a traditional sorry exception); the Prabodhan revival of high art in music and dance; a partially successful modernization of literary and visual arts (Kelkar, 'The Art of India Come of the Modern Age').

We in India don't exactly need a cultural commissar to square the accounts and we can certainly do without the cultural czars and bureaucrats of the capital today (with its nouveau riche and babu ambience). What we do need are a little more self-conscious and better-informed and self-assertive and a little less tantrum-throwing and gullible artist and a little more educated and better-informed and responsible and a little less self-conscious and jealousy-ridden and sycophantic and opinionated and word-spewing intellectual-critic. The recipients of art in India certainly deserve a better deal.

In short one can have the technological cake and eat it too. But we have to cast out the fear of technology (and the English language) or the awe of technology (and the English language) (which is much the same thing). And we have to learn not to expect either too much from art or too little from art (which is much the same failing).

The Role of Authors in Promoting India's Image

Indra Nath Choudhuri

I can assume by way of analysing the topic that the thrust of my paper should be to find out what should be the role of a contemporary Indian author in promoting India's image abroad through his creation. The immediate question will be is the West interested in our literature? Another question will be what is our present image from the point of view of our literary creation? Both these questions are interrelated with each other.

Westerners do talk about our literature but not about the living, contemporary Indian literature. Of course, they have a fascination for Tagore. But that is a different story which I shall take up later. When Schlegel said in 1800, "It is in the Orient that we must search for the highest Romanticism", he meant the India of Shakuntala and the Upanishads. So far as one can tell, most of the early English orientalists in India like William Jones were imbued with the dual purpose of investigating "the sciences and arts of Asia, with the hope of facilitating ameliorations there and of advancing knowledge and improving the arts at home". (Frederick Eden Pargiter, ed., Centenary Volume of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland 1823-1923 [London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1923], p.viii).

The study made by Anglo-French or German scholars was a kind of intellectual authority over India within western culture. Scholars like Silvertre de Sacy made it clear that oriental literature could survive a European's taste, intelligence or patience provided it was properly transformed by the orientalist before it could begin to be appreciated. Sacy further says that even if one does go through the rigors of specialized training, much of the description in poetry (Arabic) will not be accessible to Europeans "who have attained to a higher degree of civilization" (Sacy, *Melanges de Litterature Orientale*, pp. 107, 110, 111-12). Lord Macaulay in his famous 'Minute' of 1835 asserted that "our native subjects" have more to learn from us than we do from them. Even if India was discussed during that time in exotic manner for its pantheism, its spirituality, its stability, its longevity, it was invariably followed by an underestimation of India as underhumanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric and so forth. Theses of oriental backwardness, degeneracy and inequality with the West most easily associated themselves early in the nineteenth century with ideas about the biological bases of racial inequality (Edward W. Said, Orientalism, p. 206). Even if interest was shown about the people and languages of India it was to consolidate the imperial designs. Lord Curzon told the House of Lords on Sept. 27, 1909:

> "Our familiarity, not merely with the languages of the people of the East but with their customs, their feelings, their traditions, their history and religion, our capacity to understand what may be called the genius of the East, is the sole basis upon which we are likely to be able to maintain in the future the position we have won, and no step that can be taken to strengthen the position can be considered undeserving of the attention of His Majesty's Government or of a debate in the House of Lords."

In the early 20th century western orientalists delivered India to the West by interpreting India for his compatriots. The relation between these orientalists and India was essentially hermeneutical: standing before a distant, barely intelligible civilization or cultural monument, the Orientalist scholar reduced the obscurity by translating sympathetically portraying, inwardly grasping the hard-to-reach object. Yet for most of the westerners India remained beyond the occident. This cultural, temporal and geographical distance was expressed in phrases like " 'the veils of an Eastern bride' or 'the inscrutable orient' passed into the common language". This is the disappointing conclusion by the ending of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* where Aziz and Fielding attempt and fail at reconciliation:

"Why can't we be friends now? Said the other, holding affectionately. It's what I want. It's what you want."

But the horses didn't want it – they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Man beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet", and the sky said, 'No, not there.'

Despite this pessimism Orientalists like Prof. Sylvain Levi asserted in 1925, "our duty is to understand Oriental Civilization. These peoples are the inheritors of a long tradition of history, of art, and of religion, the sense of which they have not entirely lost and which they are probably anxious to prolong." We may not forget that before that in 1913 Tagore got the Nobel Prize in literature which created some kind of interest in the western mind for Indian literature. Yeats found a 'fresh rediscovery of landscape', 'joyous movement', and if not the 'voluptuous body', at least 'the tale of the nuptials of the soul with its ultimate destiny with voluptuous love details' – 'Eastern contemplation – carrying that into the very depths of the soul, restoring to us the meaning of tonight's mystery.' This idea caught up with the foreign readers who found deep mystical spiritual significance even in the love poems translated in 'The Gardener'. This kind of emphasis did not help develop the right kind of appreciation of Rabindranath. Many of his western readers practically ceased reading him because of their apathy towards spiritualism or obscure mysticism. His reputation declined very fast among western readers also because of his lectures on nationalism and his return of the knighthood after the massacre at Jalianwala Bagh in 1919 and on top of it because of his translations done by him or later on by Thompson. He was aware of the 'cracks and gaps' in his translations and was sorry that he had ever attempted 'to cover them up with some pretty designs that may give them an appearance of wholeness'. But with new translations will he regain his true position in the western mind? William Radice recently translated selected poems of Tagore about which Khushwant Singh rapturously remarked, "At long last we have a translator who has succeeded better than anyone else and brought out as one of the greatest of the great poets of all times." It is true that through this translation western readers found in Tagore not only the eastern mystic but also the humanist social critic whose poetry matched well with the literary sensibility of the present era. Even then his position did not improve much in the eyes of the western readers. Ian Jack of 'The Sunday Times' says that Prosaic Briton likes the concrete. High flown Bengal has had a long affair with the abstract. Richard Caseby writes in 'The Oxford Times' that realising the limited appeal of poems dallying with transcendence one need not doubt that there will be no stampede at the bookstalls. The love affair with the East and all-embracing abstraction has long-cooled. Does it mean that there is a cultural disparity which is based on different world-views and divergent ethos and which restrains a western reader in accepting our literature. No doubt there is a disparity but the real cause is our own failure in presenting our best literature to the West in proper translation. Why to blame a western reader? Gibb's article on 'literature' published in 1931 says, "Oriental literature has begun to be studied again for its own sake, and a new understanding of the East is being gained. As this knowledge spreads and the East recovers its rightful place in the life of humanity, oriental literature may once again perform its historic function, and assist us to liberate ourselves from the narrow and oppressive conceptions which would limit all that is significant in literature, thought and history to our own segment of the globe (H.A.R. Gibb, "Literature", The Legacy of Islam ed. Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume, p. 209). Gibb wanted to confront East as a sort of humanistic challenge to the local confines of western ethnocentricity. 'The Glory That Was India' fascinated the lover in Andrew Marvell's 'Coy Mistress'. who assures his beloved, 'Thou be the Indian Ganges' side/Should rubies find'. Writers like Marvell have regarded India as an exotic land of sadhus, snakes and suttee; others like Kipling, Forster and Mark Twain, have found the varied spectacle of humanity in this vast land, and the interaction between Indian character and western of absorbing interest; still others, like Whitman and Thoreau, Maugham and Eliot have felt the perennial appeal of Indian thought and philosophy. But we could not cash this interest in India and failed miserably in projecting our literature abroad. In 1951 the same Gibb contributed an essay to a book significantly entitled 'The Near East and the Great Powers' in which he tried to explain the need for an expansion in Anglo American programmes of Oriental studies:

> "We can no longer rely on that factor of prestige which seemed to play a large part in pre-war thinking, neither can we any longer expect the peoples of Asia and Africa or of Eastern Europe to come to us and learn from us, while we sit back. We have to learn about them so that we can learn to work with them in a relationship that is closer to terms of mutuality."

The interest shown towards oriental literature, now because of such considerations, has become political and not remained simply scholarly. The overtly imperial concern has never seized to play its role. The Soviet Russia and the East European countries are as a part of some policy objective translating Indian literature in abundance but then in the process it has caught up with the demand of the reading public. After all a great work of art, quite obviously is an effect of a great personality, by whatever standard you may have it, the eastern or the western. Russian and Eastern European universities are now producing fluent speakers in different Indian languages and they are translating Indian literature. One may agree that the study of Indian languages is becoming the instrument for propaganda but then it is also helping the propagation of Indian literature in those countries. The Indian authors like Tagore, Premchand, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Sivarama Karanth, Manik Bandyopadhyay, S.K. Pottekkat, Akilon, U.R. Anantha Murthy, Bhisham Sahni, Amrita Pritam, and many others have written about their experiences, their values, their humanity and thereby effectively disrupted the various images, clichés, abstractions by which India is generally represented. A literary text speaks more or less directly of living reality. Its force is not that it is in Hindi or French or English; its force is its encounter with life and in the power and vitality of words. Besides this, one should not forget the enthusiasm of the Russian and East European readers in accepting the humanistic tradition of involvement in a national culture or literature not one's own.

Why it is not so in America and the Western Europe and Briton? The study in cultural relativism has broadened the vision of scholars in these countries. Now one wishes to avoid the accusation of modernist or eurocentric prepossession and to uphold a pretension to universality by accepting the study of literature of India and other oriental countries. One is now ready to reconstruct the structures of the alien value systems with reference to his own value system and understand the differences and similarities. But then what about the common reader? Is he studying Indian literature? Practically very little. He has read some Indian literature written in English to know about India rather than as literature. His approach is purely documentary. He has hardly read Indian literature in English translation. Moreover people now in India have started questioning about Indian English writing. They want to know if it had all that which makes it great literature? Let me quote Dr. Amrik Singh in this context: "All that I wish to affirm is that Indian writing in English can be of good quality, and even of some significance, but it is highly unlikely that anything like greatness in literature can be achieved through the use of this medium."

I would not be a party to this kind of controversy but like to point out that in one of the anthologies of Indian English poetry covering an exhaustive list of names ranging from Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu to Dom Moraes and Pritish Nandy one finds a statement by a poet "I am an Indian writing in English... I write in English because there is always a consistency between a particular ethos and the language it produces. The Indian ethos is alien to me and so are the languages which express it" (P. Lal, ed. Modern Indian Poetry in English, p. 56). This sort of gesture confuses the image of Indian literature here and elsewhere. But then there are many outstanding contemporary writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Arun Joshi, Vikram Seth, Sashi Deshpande etc. who would never suggest a self-conscious distancing from their Indian situation and show lack of commitment to Indianness. 'The creative choice of a language must be respected and one should judge by results rather than by dismal prophecies of what the result must fail to be.' (B. Rajan, 'Identity and Nationality', ed. John Press, Commonwealth Literature, Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture, p. 108). What I would like to point out is that in the West Indian literature is generally meant to be Indian English literature which is only a minute fraction of the total literary output but the West hardly knows it. The reason is that literature in different Indian languages is not available to the West in translation and also no consistent effort has been done to promote Indian literature in translation. That as yet there stands this deafening barrier which people mention as 'translation curtain' is all very true. Attempts have been made to effect a breakthrough to do away with the translation curtain, but still they have not gathered the requisite momentum. The Sahitya Akademi has published a few Indian novels in English translation. The Unesco also, with its collection of Representative Works, has placed some significant modern Indian classics on the world map. As a part of the celebrations of the 1985 India Festival in France, several Indian literary works of Manik Banerji, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyay, U.R. Anantha Murthy, Kamala Markandeya, Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay were translated into French. But this is only a drop in the ocean. Last year in the Frankfurt Book Fair only a few Indian authors could sell the translation rights of their books. The verdict is clear. The West is still not interested in our creative literature. But how could it be so much interested in Garcia Marquez – a Latin American writer? Of course, it is because of the translation done so well that even Marquez once made a comment, 'It is better than the original'.

The disinterestedness of the western reader, some Euro-American literary fanatics say, has sprung up because of lack of 'universality' in the Indian writings. The idea is so absurd that it does not need any comment. Right from the days of Aristotle one knows that the particularity of the situation of the writer determines his perception which creates its own universals. The actual problem is how to educate the Indian reading public to the wealth and variety and excellence of writing in Indian languages. On the face of it this is a strange proposition but then this will lead us to the right course. Unless an awareness is created for our literature here at the home front we cannot think of any promotion of our literature abroad. The writers should not hesitate to give away the translation rights with all generosity and help in the translation of their creations. It is now being done extensively in the West. The translator Mr. Manguel has recently translated Yerkio Mishima's book 'A Vision of the Void' in collaboration with the author. Indian authors should come forward in a big way to promote translation of their books in different Indian languages. The Indian reading public is much interested in the study of English or American literature or European literature in translation. He is to be educated to read Indian literature not only of his language but of other Indian languages in translation. The use of English as a target language along with other Indian languages is obvious but the use of English by the Indian translators in the world market has not created any requisite interest in the common western reader for our literature mainly because of stylistic reasons and the cultural settings. An English rendering of a Tamil poem may evoke joy and excitement in us but will leave most of the western readers cold primarily because of the Indian style of the English language and the cultural prison in which a westerner generally stays. But that should not deter us. Our attempts on translation from Indian literature into English will help us to define the specific area of Indian literature, its drawbacks and its positive virtues. Moreover, our author-translators/professionals should continue the work of translating for inter-lingual understanding within the country. In the process we shall find the foreigners coming forward who know our languages. Eventually, the western writer will join his Indian collaborator and from English the work of translation will spread into other foreign languages. There is another problem. It is even true today that the majority of the western readers do not understand our literature. He cannot read and judge Indian literature as literature and like or dislike particular works as he likes or dislikes works in his own literature. Is it possible that we may encourage a retailoring and redressing of our literature to suit a different taste? Even if it is possible it won't be wise. It would be unwise to enlarge our literary market before we are sure that there has been an enlargement of taste. The enlargement of taste is primarily a literary objective which is connected with the development of a critical apparatus which will help us in placing our literature alongside the literature of the West in a common perspective. The Indian interpreters and authors must help in the reconstruction of a critical standard so that the western readers may understand our literature in a convincing way. It is a task of great magnitude. It is a task involving major affections and interests and calls for important enterprises in literary criticism.

To sum up the role of an author in this venture will be to help the translators and interpreters in affiliating our literature to the total literary inheritance of the West. Only a greater interest in the literature of our country can bring that about and only through translations this will be possible. National pride, and a passionate desire to promote a national product should not prompt the interpreters or the critics to make fantastic claims for the Indian writing. Only the best needs to be promoted which has the power of the Indian inheritance, the complexity of the Indian experience and the uniqueness of the Indian voice. The

West will have to be made aware of this inheritance, complexity and uniqueness. A great work of art is the expression both of the traditional and actual. If it is indissolubly wedded both to the exterior landscape and the interior vision then only we shall see an eastern sensibility wholly at home in a western art.

Literary Values in an Age of Technology

Shantinath K. Desai

1

The problem of literary values in an increasingly technological age inevitably reminds us of the famous controversy between the rational satirist Thomas Love Peacock and the Romantic poet Shelley during the early years of the 19th century marked by increasing industrialization of England.* Peacock said that poetry would decline as civilization (he meant industrialization) progressed, and that the growth of scientific temper would render poetry increasingly useless and primitive-looking. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, though first conceived as an answer to Peacock's cocky attack on poetry, went far beyond the limits of a 'defence' and became the quintessential statement of High Romanticism and a resounding, or as Cleanth Brooks says, rhapsodic assertion of the prophetic function of poetry. Shelley postulated the concept of Imagination as a synthesizing power as against Reason which is merely analytical. Poetry which is the expression of Imagination, Shelley maintained, presents the 'indestructible order of things' or at least a shadow of that Platonic world. Though the poet is totally concerned with his vision, with his ego-centric experience, and not with the audience (the poet being a nightingale singing to itself in the darkness of the night), he ultimately emerges as a prophet, as an unacknowledged legislator of the world, blowing the trumpet of prophecy, 'If winter comes can Spring be far behind'. The High Romantics, it appears, reacted strongly against industrialization, but they were optimistic about the divine power of the spirit which would ultimately win over the power of Mammon. During the second half of the 19th century, however, people like Matthew Arnold became aware of a great cultural crisis generated by increasing industrialization and the growth of science. Arnold, realizing that religion had lost its function, wanted Poetry to take over its function – of sustaining our life, of interpreting life for us, of consoling us. He spoke of the higher destiny of Poetry and its great role of being a religion-substitute. The great classics have within them, he said, the eternal values of life in the light of which men could see some meaning in this 'darkling plain'. Unfortunately, we in the latter half of the 20th century – after the two world wars, after the atomic bombs ('after the tea-cups and the marmalade') – cannot speak of this kind of Romantic faith in literature that Shelley and Arnold were capable of.

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* Paper presented at the seminar "The Writer and his Audience in an Increasingly Technological Age", Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

The socio-cultural crisis engendered by the ugliness and chaos of industrial capitalism and imperialistic adventurism generated three more attitudes which are relevant to our discussion. One, the abnormal attitude of Aestheticism (Life is chaotic and ugly; Art is systematic and beautiful. In art form is everything, style is everything. Art is not concerned with life or morals. Art is for its own sake.); two, the concept of art as an instrument of social change (cf. H.G. Wells, Bernard Shaw and the Marxists); and three, the attitude of Realism (The artist's business is to observe life as a spectacle and depict it as it is, without making value-judgements. The function of art is not to teach men but to make them 'see' things as they are.)

With the deepening of the crisis in the 20th century, the crisis being paralleled and aggravated by the phenomenal growth of technology, there has been a rise of many isms – Impressionism, Expressionism, Imagism, Symbolism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Neo-Classicism, Neo-Romanticism, Existentialism, Absurdism and so on – all indicating the increasing fragmentation of our socio-cultural and ethico-philosophical ethos, generating individual explorations and experimentations. And now we are in the middle of a vast technological revolution – the electronic revolution with profound potentialities in creating new and unforeseen structures of life and we have to think of literature, of the literary process, in this new context (the context of Elvin Tofflin's *Future Shock*).

One of the things that has become evident, I hope, from the brief account of the changes of literary approaches from 19th century onwards is that there are no eternal values, let alone eternal literary values, that there is no 'indestructible order of things' that literature is associated with. The only thing is: Life is, technology is and literature is! But not without interrelationships, not without continuous interactions and mutual influences and contradictions.

II

In addition to the above historical perspective, we have to bear in mind two trends of thinking about technological development: One, that of Aldous Huxley, who in his *Brave New World* conceives of

Technological Revolution as a dehumanizing process – a process which leads to the annihilation of literature, to the condition of civilization which is totally incapable of understanding Shakespeare. Two, that of C.P. Snow, who maintains that there are now two cultures – one, the scientific-technological culture, the other, the literary-humanistic culture – co-existing without any significant interaction.

Now, to talk of literature in concrete terms as a cultural process involving writers and readers, we have in every age, as Q.D. Leavis says in her *Fiction and the Reading Public*, three kinds of literature – high-brow literature, middle-brow literature and low-brow literature. It would be profitable to think of the nature of these three kinds of literature in the age increasing technology. Because of the tremendous capacity of technology to reach a vast number of people simultaneously, it will serve as a purveyor of popular culture or mass culture. Low-brow literature, therefore, will get a tremendous boost in terms of easy visual transformations. There will be a multiplication of *Dullas* or *Dynasts* series, of *Khandan* or *Buniyad* series, and it would become increasingly difficult to fight against deeply vulgarized taste on a vast scale. The deep and extensive entrenchment of the low-brow in art will inevitably generate greater sense of alienation in high-brow art. High-brow literature, for instance, will become greatly sophisticated in terms of language and content (say, like Rashdie or Tolkien) and maintain an unbridgeable gap between itself and the popular low-brow literature. It will feed upon the ego-centric, esoteric values of Romanticism and Modernism and lose its blood-relationship with the recognizable world we live in. In this context, the middle-brow literary world will, I think, suffer from bewilderment and confusion of values. On the one hand, the writers and readers of this world will be inevitably drawn downwards to the glittering and sensational world of low-brow literature, and, on the other, they will grow increasingly ambivalent towards the high-brow. This situation is highly dangerous from the point of view of socio-cultural equilibrium required for the production of significant literature, since technological forces will have totally disturbed this equilibrium. So, though technology has made it possible for good and great literature to reach all corners of the world, it has also increased the power of the Mammon hundred-fold, and this will reduce the creative and positive possibilities of technology by swamping the world with the 'popular' low-brow stuff and corrupting the potentially creative middle-brow world. C.P. Snow's concept of two cultures will hold true within the world of literature, too, in a different way: the high-brow culture on the one hand and, on the other, the low-brow, with no middle-brow culture successfully bridging the gap.

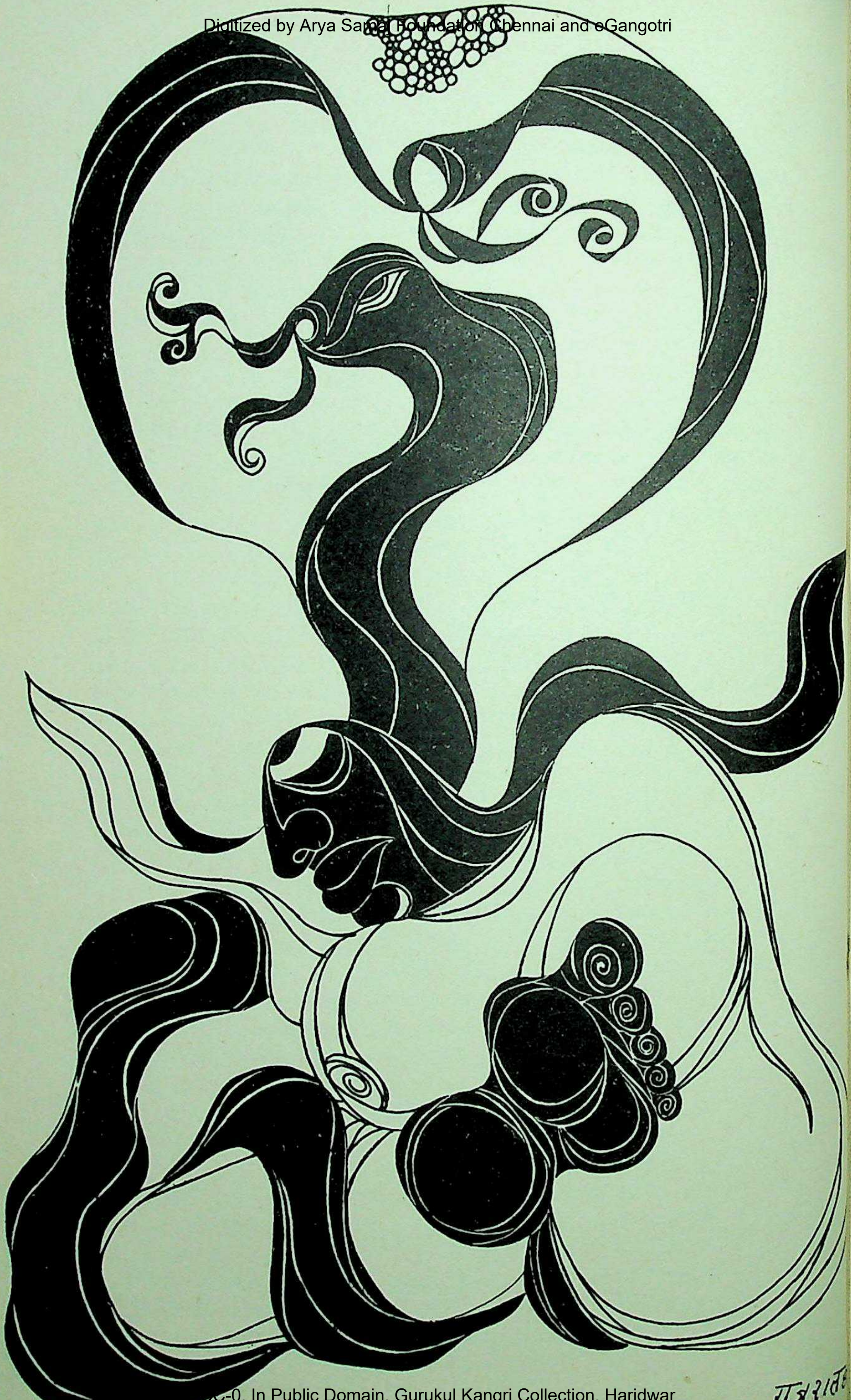
III

The assumptions underlying my arguments so far have been:

a. Literary values are relative: Each age has its own hierarchy of literary values, its own pattern of significations, its own peculiar emphases, though they have their usual relationships with language, form, content, artistic unity and with world-vision and so on.

b. Literary values differ in accordance with the three writer-reader groups in every age – the high-brow, the middle-brow and the low-brow. But normally the values are modified, preserved and protested against in terms of a continuous life-giving dialogue generally between the high-brow and the middle-brow. (The low-brow are not generally conscious of the literary values at all.)

The question of literary values has worried all the major critics of this century. It is comforting to see that no one speaks of pure aesthetic values, the way the aesthetes did in the 1890's. T.S. Eliot, who is constantly aware of the ugliness and horror of the 20th century world of technology, speaks of aesthetic values only upto a point and emphases the unity of sensibility as well as a deep religious vision as significant values in literature. F.R. Leavis speaks of 'openness to life', or 'possibilities of life' that a work of art enshrines as important, but emphasises the moral exploration as the most important value in a work of art. He stresses the writer's maturity of response alongwith the firmness of his grasp of both material and language as decisive factors. I.A. Richards, too, like both Eliot and Leavis, speaks of, in addition to the equilibrium of sensibility, the importance of life-values implicity in a work of art. The increasingly technological age has, naturally, its own characteristic emphases and predilections. The technological age has two powerful tendencies in it: One, since the technology is transforming the world into a global village and has made communication possible and easy between the remotest parts of the world, it is but inevitable that the humanist and secular values, the values of human solidarity, gain precedence in the order of things to come. Two, since the world-community is too large a concept to think of, there will be a greater urge, I believe, to preserve one's identity in terms of one's local culture and local social group. In fact, unity in diversity will probably be one of the supreme literary values in the technological age. Thirdly, the technological development has in it, as Aldous Huxley points out, awful dehumanizing tendencies. Hence the literature of the age of technology should contain a profound sense of warning against the dehumanising and destructive forces inherent in it. Fourthly, the tremendous exposure that the technological development gives us in respect of the vast world outside and also in respect of the possibilities of various structures of life in the world creates a sense of bewilderment and confusion, psychologically and philosophically. Hence a good work of art in a technological age should emphasise the necessity of rootedness in the concrete life around and the necessity of coherent structures of meaning which alone give a sense of fulfilment in life. It is needless to say that the age of technology with its possibilities of multiplicity of interactions would encourage great linguistic and formal sophistication and complexity in a good work of art. Meaningful complexity in both matter and form is, one might say, one of the most important values of the literature of the age of technology. Lastly, since the age of technology, as Orwell fears, contains within itself vast possibilities of concentration of Power, of suppression of freedom and of inhuman manipulations of every kind, struggle for freedom and human dignity will continue to be the central concern of all good works of literature.


गुजराल

The Peacocks

U.R. Ananthamurthy

I now have a house in Bangalore; I am on the phone. My two children go to a good school. Therefore I cannot say 'Damn you' whenever I am piqued and throw up my job as my father did. Mother never had a silk sari until I began to work; neither did we have a good square meal before; and father lost our respect as he grew older, all because of his love of freedom and his wilful ways. Although, I am like my father to look at, we are very different. Still, whenever I quarrel with my wife, I never fail to play up father's sense of self-respect and gloss over his shortcomings. Thus I indirectly give her to understand that if I am unlike my father, it is because of her. This is how I warm myself up in the glow of my ego – by spurning the social status she values so highly, after doing all I could to provide for her and the children handsomely. I tell her: I don't care a straw for the social prestige that you make so much of!

But really I have been so weak that I have always wanted her to shape me into what I am. She was a slim, tall girl when I married her, and had none of these desires then. Perhaps no girl has. Isn't it more correct to say that I have subtly wanted her to use me, rather than that she has been using me to gain her ends? The human mind can find a thousand subtle ways for betrayal.

I understand all this. Yet I go on being what I have always been. Nobody changes by mere awareness alone.

I want to know whether I was really pure in my boyhood days as sometimes I persuade myself to believe. I cannot discuss these things with my wife. Her energy gets used up in seeing that I do not turn a boozer or a spendthrift, that I do not fall ill. "Without you I would have been noble", I lash out at her, "I would have been an adventurer, a poet," etc. etc. She has lost her former vivacity in sharpening her tongue to combat me. Our quarrels are such that they make us more and more mean as we go on. We both get sick of everything, the phone, the house, the car and all. She knows that all these fights are only different modes of self-torture. She might, some day, start being kind to me; but

I am afraid that by then I will have become like a stove filled with smoke. If she had loved someone poorer than I, perhaps I would have respected her. I really don't know. But we have made each other so ugly that no one can love us.

You remember I said I have always wanted to know if I was really pure as a boy? I feel like this when my wife sings occasionally. And she sings very rarely these days. She has a lovely voice. When I listen to her singing I feel disturbed. I ask myself: Why have we made each other so miserable? Or is it simply that she has a throat which vibrates and the vibrations strike my ears as music and what this music implies for me is really not there in her at all?

Suppose my sorrow that nothing happens here to shake life by the roots is nothing more than an artifice which I have fashioned to cover my pettiness or to keep alive the vanity which is essential to promote myself? Even this kind of self-analysis cannot be of any use to me. I still remain what I have always been. I go on repeating what I have already done. Take me in my office, for example, I am courteous and honest. I am even compassionate towards the peons. Nothing but a strategy to climb higher!

Why shouldn't I? This mental torment which makes me repulsive to myself I don't feel when I sit nodding, digesting a heavy meal. Yet I am not happy, I know.

Belonging neither here nor there I wonder if as a boy I was whole and pure. Father has been dead these six years. I went to my village with my wife and children for the anniversary of his death. Mother still lives in the village. She wouldn't come away from there and live with us in the town. "I am happy here", she says. Pretending that she did not believe her, my wife cunningly coaxed her to say some hurtful words like, "No, really, why should I come in the way of your happiness?" So that mother should stay on in the village out of her own free will without causing any embarrassment to me by doing so. That was how my wife brought it about. Perhaps she learnt even this artfulness from me. In this way she accomplishes the things which I detest but want all the same. To climb higher I often have to ask my superiors to dinners and drinks. She knows that this is going to be difficult if mother comes to stay with us. I think that mother knows this too. How cleverly I play this game! I have no use for such self-awareness either. My boss appreciates self-criticism. We have both indulged in it sipping our whiskies in the golf club.

When I went home for the *sradha* I drove on my own to another village, some fifteen miles away. Our family had lived in that place when I was a boy. The dusty road between the woods had not changed a bit. I drove slowly, looking at the bare autumn trees and the scarlet flowers. Then suddenly I remembered an incident which had taken place when I was a boy of eight or ten. I felt a twinge in my heart as I do when I listen to my wife's singing.

Mother was ill and bed-ridden. She always lay down in her bed among a number of bottles of pills and mixtures. There was also a bowl by her side. One Sunday she called me and muttered: "Kittu, go and see what father is doing there. And come back quick." Those days grandfather and grandmother were staying with us. I remember how grandpa, with a turban on his head, used to settle down every evening for taking part in *tala maddale*. I put on my newly washed shirt and shorts and set out. To see father I had to go to Halasinur where he was looking after the accounts of a friend of his called Govindaraya. At that time he had just resigned his job of a post-master at Kumsi over some quarrel with the postal authorities.

I think I started running, sometimes tossing with my toes the stones that came my way, and taking the direction in which they fell. I vividly remember that I came across my school on the way. A soft, doughy dust had settled on the mud-floor of the school. There were many cone-shaped holes in it where the ant-lions dwelt unseen. If you take an ant-lion on your palm it begins to move about, which gives you a pleasant titilation. As boys we used to rake its hole till it came out and we would ask "Show us the way to Kashi!" Then this dark-brown creature with a thick crust on its back would start creeping backwards! It was simply thrilling!

After inspecting some of these creatures I went on. I saw a great yawning pit in the woods. I went near it and looked in. Later I came to a paddy field. On its right side there was a hill frequented by the peacocks. I had heard their cackle almost every morning, evening and night. But mother had never allowed me to go to the hill to see them. A man who came selling the peacock-plumes once told me that these birds danced elegantly. He used to hunt them for their meat. I decided that on my way back I should hide behind a tree and watch the dance of the peacocks; I would also collect a few plumes to place them inside a book where they are expected to give birth to their young ones.

I crossed the village stile. There were still the same old shoe-flower shrubs with bunches of red blossoms on them. There were still the old exora shrubs bearing tiny red fruits that are slightly sourish. There were the old wild black-berries too. Now that so many of these fruits were left to themselves on the shrubs it seemed that there were no children around. Janakamma, that is the widow of Govindaraya, didn't have children anyway.

Janakamma's house was of a middling size, on the larger side, perhaps. It was a two-storeyed house with tiled roofs. As a boy I had been taken in by its magnitude. For me it was a house where the stories of Bhatti and Vikramaditya could very well have taken place. I was told these stories by Janakamma in the nights when I happened to stay there. It had the attics, dark corners, door-frames and engraved beams all of which would make the most eerie ghost stories seem real. The room on the first floor in which Janakamma slept, with the reproductions of Ravivarma's paintings, the broad and heavy wooden bed, the smell of sandal and incense, resembled some fabulous bed-room from where the heroine of a romance could sling a rope-ladder for her prince charming to reach her or wherein she could keep her lover transformed into a parrot in a cage, safe from discovery during the day.

I was just tripping into the living-room when I was stopped by the presence of a crippled woman there. She had a broad, whey-coloured face, a nose too small for it, a flabby chin and a mop of lousy hair. There was a large *kumkum* dot on her forehead. She began to shout at me "Bae! Bae! Bae!" I knew that she was always to be found in the living-room. Still she gave me such a fright. This thing was a cousin of Janakamma's and her name was Kalyani. She had been nominally married to one Nagappa, who had a deformed hand. It was simply to conform with the social convention and nothing more. For Nagappa already had another wife. Kalyani always kept a vessel of water and some rags with her, and went on scrubbing the floor of the living-room. Otherwise, she would sit in a corner coiling herself up like a snake. As a result of her toil the concrete floor glistened like a looking-glass. That day she shouted at me because she found that my feet were all soiled. I went out, washed my feet and came in.

The cripple crawled towards me. I asked her about father. She seemed to have sensed the meaning of my inquiry. Her whitish face instantly turned red like the face of a chameleon and was strangely distorted with glee. She began to shove me in the direction of the bathroom. It surprised me to think that father should be taking his bath at that time. Kalyani hauled herself towards the kitchen and stopped there. She made some gestures with her eyes, lips and hands as if to tell me that she would not accompany me beyond that point and that I would have to go in alone. She nodded her head, feeling quite satisfied that I got her meaning, and immediately withdrew to the living-room, perhaps to remove my foot-prints, if any, from the otherwise spotless floor.

When I approached the bathroom I heard the splashing sound of water. I also heard father's laugh. At home I had never heard him laugh at all. Whenever he talked to mother he was in an irritable temper. On entering the bath-room I found him stripped. Janakamma was rinsing his back. The moment she saw me she rose and came to me. She took me to the kitchen, fondling me all the way, and filled my hands and pockets with candies. She told me: "Your mother is ill and so I had to give your father an oil-bath. Don't you see he was badly in need of one?" She lead me to her bed-room and showed me the peacocks' hill through the window. "Want to go there, my dear?", she asked, and added, "You won't tell mother that he was taking a bath here, will you? If you tell, her fever will rise." I went on nodding to whatever she said. When at last I came out Kalyani laughed from a corner where she had coiled up. She fondly signed to me to come near her but I ran away. I was idling about alone in the garden till evening.

Now I imagine that I didn't understand the meaning of what I had seen. But I am not sure. What was Janakamma doing with my father when her husband was away? Did it first strike my mind when I saw a pair of dogs making love to each other on the side of a hill? I remember how breathlessly I waited for them to unite. Did I then catch the meaning of all that had gone before? Did I know it then and there or did it take years for me to know? I can never tell.

Many years after that incident I found myself arguing that father's way of life was right. See, there have always been subways for the fulfilment of life, I said. But these details are out of point here. For when I went alone to Janakamma's house after the *sradha*, the thing that worried me most was the question about my boyhood. Namely, whether rapture, the dissolving of the self, was possible for me in those days. I required an answer to this question for me to grow beyond my wife; and to grow beyond her was for me to transcend the drudgery and the commonplace of my everyday life.

There was the same cripple Kalyani in the living-room. She had become very old. Her head was shaven. Her dried up face looked fallow and hideously distorted. One couldn't tell whether it belonged to a man or a woman. Her 'husband' must have died. Even now she was crawling and scrubbing. She didn't seem to spot me. I went upstairs.

I am still uncertain whether father derived any gratification from this woman or not. Before my own marriage I had thought of sex as a big thing. But sex has gradually ended up for me as a requisite for sleep. Not that I have not desired any other woman than my wife. Between the thighs sex has now become tame, that is all. It was perhaps the same in the case of father also. On that day of my discovering him with Janakamma, he got home before me, quarrelled with mother for having sent me to him, and then whipped me. Mother took me to task for coming home so late. I had slipped and broken the skin of my knee in my hurry to get home. So I wept. For a few days father did not go to Janakamma's house. Then he began it all over again. But as days passed, after the death of Govindaraya, his behaviour to Janakamma became quite detached. He finally stopped seeing her. He retired into his own shell and ignored mother's grumbles. Life is like that – I thought. But how can I say that when I was climbing the stairs to meet Janakamma I was not hoping to discover some other possibilities of love? I am still seeking something. After all if I didn't have the urge to transcend my wife, my drudgery and my own woeful verdicts, I would not have undertaken this journey after the anniversary of father's death.

Janakamma recognized me. She was chewing *pan* in her toothless mouth in the same old bed-room that didn't look so romantic now. "Welcome, Kittanna!", she said, "when did you come? You shall have coffee." She got up and I followed her to the kitchen. It had been kept very tidy. I sat on a low wooden seat. Janakamma inquired after mother's condition. She went on asking me about my children, my wife and her accomplishment, my salary, house, car and so on. My baffling discovery of her with father in the bathroom; the row that followed, her carrying on the affair for some time afterwards, and the subsequent estrangement – none of these seemed to perturb her. She had still kept her good looks. Her grey hair was done in a bun. She was wearing a white sari, and had a gold bangle to each hand and a gold chain on her neck. Even in widowhood this woman looked better than my mother. When at last I got up to take leave of her she told a servant to put two bunches of bananas in my car. "Give them to your mother," she said to me, "she loves bananas. And take some jackfruit jam for the children." She thrust a packet wrapped in paper into my hand and walked with me up to the stile to see me off.

It was late afternoon. I scurried towards the foot of the hill. I felt like sitting there under a tree as in the past. I had hidden myself behind a tree then, with a broken skin on the knee. After a long time, some four or five peacocks had hopped down the hill to the paddy field. They had danced freely right in front of me – swinging on tiptoe, unfurling their wings, hoisting their plumage like a flag, holding their necks and crests high, while the eye in each plume flashed. They had fluttered like a bamboo thicket in the wind, and cackled. The spell under which I had forgotten everything – the hill, the field, the crippled woman, Janakamma, father, mother, the broken skin and the bathroom – I wondered whether this spell would repeat for me now. I stood behind a tree, lit a cigarette and waited.

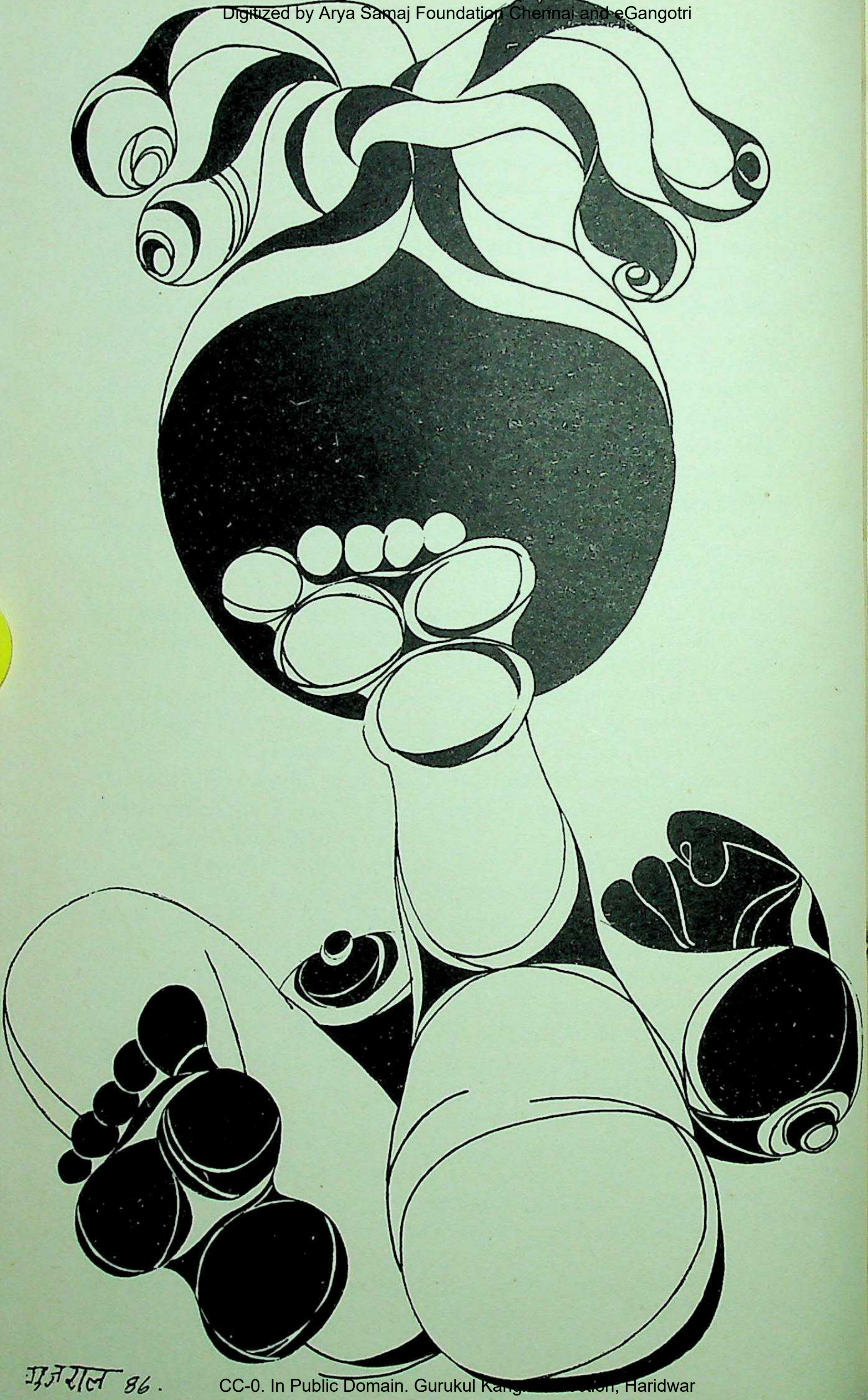
Yes, the peacocks came and went. They must have been a nuisance to the farmers. Some plumes had fallen on the ground. I collected a few for my daughter.

Years ago I had done the same thing. But now my mind was not at peace. Why wasn't I able to feel any rapture today? Are the years responsible for it? I don't have the lustrous eyes of a boy, I may argue. Was I really fascinated by the birds, or did I wait there anxious only to gather a few plumes for my book? I can never know. Nor do I want to know that no stage of this life is wholesome. How can a man in his forties recapture his past? What exactly is the relation between this me of the present and that boy of bygone years? Is it true or false that I was always like what I am now? Is it only a way of clearing up my remorse? Or is it mind's subtle betrayal? One thing is real, that nothing that I have ever touched has been pure any longer.

The actual moment and not the reflection of it – the agony that I felt when I got into my car, the suffering which I could not give voice to – that was the real thing.

When I entered the house, with the banana bunches in my hand, mother was describing to my wife, father's fondness for her. My wife was annoyed that I was late. My eight-year old daughter was delighted to get the peacock plumes. She could use them as book-marks.

Translated from the original Kannada
by K.V. Tirumalesh



गुजराल 86.

The Womb

Chaman Nahal

In a frieze above the main entrance were the numerals of a year, 1880, though the haveli was older than that and parts of it had been built and rebuilt several times over. Since it was situated right on the main Chandni Chowk, presumably the plinth dated back to the days when the city of Delhi was laid out – centuries back. Modern refinements had now been introduced – electricity, telephones, intercoms, gas ovens, TVs – but the old refinements of aristocracy remained. The brass railings that lined the stairs leading from the bazaar to the first floor were surely fitted into the walls with brackets, but right on top were also fitted two brass hands as though the railings were held by them. The electric bulbs were lowered into the candle-stand chandeliers. The phones were hidden in niches. The TVs were firmly encased in heavy mahogany frames.

And then there were things that were not modernized – deliberately. Or perhaps because they could not be modernized. Such as the narrow passages. There were at least fifty rooms in the haveli, which was spread out in the form of connecting quadrangles. They were like the ridges of a mountain, the quadrangles, unending. In a joint Hindu household such a structure provided privacy to members of the family. The joint family had since long broken up. But the quadrangles had stayed. Outside each room there were pulleys placed on triangular pads. Over the pulleys ran the strings for the pankhas inside the rooms. The pankhas and the pankha pullers were gone, but the pulleys had stayed.

Different members of the family ran different types of businesses at different times. They need have run no business at all; the rent from the shops below the haveli was sufficient to maintain the family in affluence. Yet they ran the businesses and in most cases abandoned them after a while. The fixtures of their abandoned businesses had also stayed; no one had bothered to remove them. In one quadrangle there were looms standing. In another sewing machines with foot paddles were stacked. In yet another was the machinery for producing plastic cables.

The passages connecting the quadrangles were so narrow two persons couldn't walk abreast through them. There were miles and miles of them. For no reason they turned a corner, or climbed six steps, and a while later climbed six steps down.

A lot of oxidized iron was used in the haveli. Frills, cornices, linings of the ceilings. The ceilings had since been painted grey. In other places, the oxidized iron had stayed black and unrusted.

Generations of children had been born in the haveli, grown up here, produced children of their own, and then died. The present patriarch had had the longest run; he was ninety-one. And sadly enough, the time had come for him to die too.

These were Lala Ram Prashad's own words. Yes, sadly enough, he whispered as he lay prostrate on a large bed in one of the rooms. It was a room befitting his status, quite big. On the wall ahead there was an empty space where once hung a large portrait. It was of Lala Ram Prashad's father, who had bought the haveli from its previous owner, and put the year of the purchase in the frieze on the main entrance. The portrait was removed by one of Lala Ram Prashad's sons; in his opinion it was too ornate. Lala Ram Prashad had not objected. There were so many other changes in the haveli which he had not objected to, either. During his own life-time, three other generations had come to flourish, two world wars had been fought, India had become free of the British Raj, the younger generations' aspirations had so dramatically changed and how long could he, an old doddering man who many in the haveli regarded as somewhat insane, have continued to assert himself? And yet this was a benign world, a benign city, a benign haveli. His morning walks through the gardens outside Kashmiri Gate, his baths in the Yamuna, his prayers at the Gauri Shankar temple at the head of Chandni Chowk, the rumbling of the trams through Chandni Chowk until the trams and their tracks were dismantled, the call of the muezzin from the nearly Fatehpuri Mosque, the shabads that he heard in Gurdwara Sis Ganj, and the sounds and smells of the bazaar, these were good sounds, good smells, good for his nose and his ears, good for his soul, and very soon, it seemed to him, he would be saying a farewell to them all.

'Are you sure he would go this time?' asked a woman in the room.

'Definite,' said another woman.

'He has been ill before. He always recovers.'

'Not this time. He can't even walk to the bathroom unaided.'

There was tremendous relief in the voices of the two women, as if that is how it should be. The man had lived too long, interfered too long, and they were at last getting rid of him.

Lala Ram Prashad peered at them through his glasses. Both his eyes had been operated upon for cataract and his lenses were very thick; he had given up most of his reading after the operations, even the reading of a newspaper, and wore his spectacles when he had to; he found them too heavy. Now, at the time of his imminent departure from the world, he insisted on wearing them all the time even though they cut through the flesh of his nose and created a wound there. He wanted to see as much more as he could.

The two were the wives of his two sons. Two middle-aged, heavy and greedy wives of his two greedy sons. They had children who had grown up and married and produced children, but the coating of greed had remained on their hearts. One son was in government service, the other did some business; neither had followed his father in the jewellery business in which Lala Ram Prashad had made most of his money. There were his daughters too, all married. Three of them. Three middle-aged, heavy women, with heavy arms and heavy haunches and greedy as hell. They had their children who had married and had children. He indeed was very old, a great-grandfather, who should have by now vanished from the scene. But why should he have? Why this imperative? He would go, anyone who is born has one day to die; that's the very law of life. Only why this hurry? This *unseemly* hurry?

Lala Ram Prashad said something to the two women.

He had taken out his denture and his words were not too coherent. The two women bent close to him and then made a gesture of impatience.

'What *are* you saying, father?' said the older of the two, whose dyed hair was too black for her withered face.

Lala Ram Prashad again said something what to him was coherent enough.

The two women again leaned close to him, again made gesture of impatience.

'We can't hear you, father,' said the younger one, fat and chubby, who moved one step at a time haltingly like a chessman.

Lala Ram Prashad heaved a sigh and began looking at them. Old though he was, till the other day he was healthier than these two, healthier than his sons and his grandsons. They complained of an ache here and an ache there, they faltered in their steps, their hands shook when they drank their tea. He was still compact and coherent, solid, in full control of his body and his mind.

'Why are you staring at us? What do you want?' asked the older one irritably.

His eyes through the thick lenses looked huge, like two pools in which floated his irises, and the women were frightened.

'Like that only,' said Lala Ram Prashad, though again the women could make nothing out.

Ignoring him, the women began to chatter and gossip, every now and then touching the diamond jewellery they were wearing, jewellery bequeathed to them by *him*. Lala Ram Prashad sadly smiled to himself.

At this stage, Priya, Lala Ram Prashad's great-granddaughter came into the room. She was four, the youngest member of the clan, and there was a great rapport between her and Lala Ram Prashad. She had brown hair, a straight nose, delicate nostrils and slim limbs. She glided through the room and hugged the man on the bed.

'I have been to my first class,' she whispered near his ear.

Lala Ram Prashad whispered back. She understood him at once and said: 'Thoroughly.'

'What is he saying?' one of the women asked her.

'Great-grandpa wanted to know if I enjoyed school.'

'Oh!'

Priya was sorry her grandmother was so harsh.

This illness struck Lala Ram Prashad almost every winter. In spite of the modernization, the haveli was too damp. It needed a new coat of paint, it needed some better ventilation, it needed a general cleaning up, and the family did not have the money for large scale repairs. So Lala Ram Prashad each winter developed a cough, a cold and a fever. But he was like a strong ship which could weather any storm, and very soon he got well again. Only this once, the fever went too high, his cough acquired a nasty tone, his appetite vanished, and worst of all his legs refused to hold him steady. This was a beating he was unwilling to take. In defiance, several times he got up – and fell flat on the ground. His family were all against it; they did not want him to fracture a bone. It would be so inconvenient to remove him to a hospital. He was going, he should go peacefully, without putting them to further bothers. Lala Ram Prashad knew how their minds worked, and he felt cheated. Persistently, when no one was around, in the middle of the night, he would try and get up. He would totter for a few seconds and then – fall flat, either on the bed or on the ground.

They came rushing when they heard the thud.

'Now, what have you been up to? Haven't we told you to summon us if you want to go to the bathroom?' said one of his sons, holding him by the arm.

'What for is that electric bell by your side? Why don't you press it?' said the other son, also holding him.

One of his sons had a bad kidney, the other was suffering from high blood pressure. Why don't they worry about their own mortality, hissed Lala Ram Prashad, as he shook them off.

'Why don't you press the bell?' the son persisted. 'Or have you forgotten how to do this? Look –' he caught his hand and put it on the bell. 'Now, press it with your thumb.'

The fool, the fool, thought Lala Ram Prashad, refusing to apply the necessary pressure.

'Press, great-grandpa,' urged Priya, who too had appeared on the scene.

Lala Ram Prashad smiled at the child and at once pressed the bell. To the annoyance of his sons, he now refused to release the bell which kept ringing, while Priya went into peals of laughter.

'Stop, stop. Do you know where you are? You are quite out of your mind?' screamed his son who had the bad kidney.

The other son also screamed.

Lala Ram Prashad stopped and watched them sadly. He had built such hopes on them and they had let him down so badly. They had all let him down, even his daughters.

He must have been very handsome once, a handsomeness that having skipped one generation, his own children's, had surfaced in many of the other offsprings. Take Priya. She had his fair skin, his brown hair, his sharp but delicate nose. In his youth he used to wrestle at the akhara on the ridge – for exercise. He retained his muscular build for years, and the calves of his legs, as he wore his churidars, could be the pride of any fencier or archer. He ate voraciously three meals a day. He was known for his amorous excesses too, though many of those stories he invented to tease his wife. The wife was long since dead. He had lost track of their children but his brothers, who had sold their shares of the haveli to him, were dead as well. So were most of his fellow jewellers or friends in the bazaar. The last of his friends had died only a year ago. He was very fond of copying out the *Bhagavad Gita* in his own hand and sending the copies to his friends. Lala Ram Prashad had received three such copies from him and written to him profuse letters of thanks. He would have liked to follow his example and make out copies of the religious text, but who would he send them to? And who cared for the *Gita* these days, anyway? At least not in his household. Even he, because of his age, had stopped singing his daily bhajans. And no one except him went near the little temple he had built inside the haveli.

This handsome, muscular man with vast appetites was now reduced to a skeleton – a handsome skeleton. For the last fifteen days he had eaten nothing. Occasionally he took some milk, and that was all. The job of feeding him or dressing him up was given to an old servant in the family, or one of his grandsons helped, especially Arjun, the father of Priya. Only Lala Ram Prashad resented any assistance since he could well manage his routine by himself. In these ninety years he had not been once to a hospital. His vital organs still functioned smoothly inside of him: his heart, his lungs, his brain. But for fifteen days he had not gone to the dining room; he was fed on his bed alone. He still insisted on being sponged every day, and on a new set of clothes. He also insisted on being shaved, for which a barber came up from the bazaar. A line of silver white hair hung like buntings around his head; even on the top the skin retained the thinned hair. After he was cleaned up, he even combed the little hair he was left with. And as the skeleton stretched himself on the bed, it retained a regal poise.

The emaciation of his flesh had started some years ago. It was only when you touched him that you realized how thin he had gone. Everyone who went to meet him had to bend before him to receive his blessings. The touch of his hand on their heads had become a feather touch. Slowly his clevicles, the rib cage, the bones of his arms and legs had all begun to show. In fifteen days the patriarch had further faded, and now the sides of his cervical vertebrae, connecting his head with his rib cage were also showing.

'He's gone so thin,' Lala Ram Prashad heard one of his sons say to the other.

'He'll last for weeks yet,' said the other.

'All those tax arrears, what are we going to do?'

'We have to pull the haveli down.'

'And then?'

'Then what. We'll build apartments here, the way they are doing in C.P.'

'C.P.?'

'Connaught Place, man. That's the only way to make fast money these days. We'll pay off the taxes and still be left with lakhs, even crores.'

'We have a large family. The apartments will be divided amongst them only.'

'We'll build high. We will still have many – to rent or to sell.'

'How high?'

'As high as the law will allow.'

'We could rebuild the shops as well in the bazaar.'

'Naturally. They will come down with the haveli. We'll create a plaza there. Air-conditioned. We could put in a cinema there, too.'

'That will be fabulous.'

'Only we can do nothing so long he is there.'

'That won't be long.'

'You never know. He has a knack of facing calamities.'

'What about his will?'

'Everything to us only, with bequeaths for our sisters. There is nothing about not pulling the haveli down in it.'

'Hope it doesn't strike him at this stage.'

'You can't put anything past him.'

The sons were talking in hushed voices, but Lala Ram Prashad's ears were sound and he heard it all. He was having a slight respite from the cough and he had closed his eyes. He now opened the eyes and knew that there was no one in the room; the sons had left. Fumbling for his glasses under his pillows he put them on. The bridge hurt as it settled on the wound on the nose. Ignoring the hurt, he began to stare at the grey ceiling. Now he knew what they were conniving at, what their scheme was, and his brave old eyes filled with tears. His demise would mean the demise of many old values in the haveli, he was certain, but that it would mean the demise of the haveli itself he had not for a second thought of. And this tore a hole through his emaciated skeleton of a body. Building high. Apartments. Plaza. In his vocabulary one built only wide not high, one built quadrangles that provided and not locked out space, one built vestibules which were made into shops and stores but which were only a protection below for the family that rested in comfort above. He had seen the speed at which some of the high rises in the city had come up. These children of his were dreaming of blowing up a heritage of more than a century in a matter of weeks! And in his agony he broke into a spasm of cough again.

No, these medicines were doing him no good at all, he was getting worse. The doctor came each day, applied his stethescope to his chest, shook his head and added a new drug to the list. Only no improvement occurred. His chest now gave out a wheezing sound as he breathed. There was a spitoon beside the bed but increasingly to raise himself to spit into it was also becoming an effort, a laborious effort. His temperature too was high, above 102. If the medicines did not work, his nature cure did not work either. His sponging and his poultaces and mud baths too brought him no relief. Apparently, the old engine was just running out of steam. His parts were intact, but the energy that burned inside and gave him the necessary zest had faded.

He wanted badly for that energy to burn in him just for one more time, for one brief day, for one brief hour. His sons were right; he could still show them a trick or two. He would simply cut them out of his will. Pass all the property and the other savings on to his grandchildren. When that seemed too protracted, he thought of adding a line to the existing will that for the next fifty years the haveli was not to be rebuilt or sold or mortgaged or changed in any form whatsoever. Yes, that would see most of them to the cremation ghat, he coughed and coughed. And then a more gifted, a more imaginative successor might rise – like this Priya – who would want to save it for yet another fifty years. There was no need to think farther than that.

He coughed and coughed and an attendant came in to help him spit into the spitoon. The spasm of cough was so severe that his sons arrived as well, and their wives, and some of the grandchildren. Lala Ram Prashad had still to work out some of the intricacies of the will but that crowd in his room incapacitated him. He was now considering where the will was, but couldn't decide where. In the safe in his room, in the bank, with one of his sons? No, his mind swam and Lala Ram Prashad found the thread of his reasoning going. He should better settle for a piece of paper and scribble a few lines. That would have the same effect as the alteration in the will. Perspiration broke on his forehead though it was winter. Feeling utterly caged, he said something to the throng that was leaning on him.

'Can't make out, father. What do you want?'

'Say it again, father.'

'Sorry, can't make out.'

'Great-grandpa wants some paper,' said Priya who was huddled close to the bed.

'Paper? What does he want the paper for?' they said to each other.

A piece of paper was procured and pushed before him.

'Great-grandpa wants a pen,' said Priya.

A pen too was furnished to him.

He held the pen in his hand and took ages while he stared at the paper. They all stood expectantly, but Lala Ram Prashad found his hand lacked the power to keep the pen steady. Finally he put the paper and the pen near his pillows and sank on them, when all began to speak loudly as a sign of relief.

During the following few days a unique scene was repeatedly acted out in the Ram Prashad Haveli. Though it was Bisheshwar Prasad who had bought the building, it was Ram Prashad who had given it its days of glory: friendly feasting, religious sat sangs, kavi sammelans and mushairas. At the height of his career he was the most respected jeweller in the whole of Chandni Chowk. It was he alone who had put in electricity, telephones and plumbing, when they became available. Yet he did not alter the character of the haveli; he only strengthened it. How that fortune began to dwindle was a long story, in which maybe his intransigent character had also a part to play; he simply wouldn't compromise on anything. Be that as it may, soon other hands would come to be masters of the place and they were planning to raise it to the ground. And while he had the time, he wanted to look at it.

Each day, at odd hours, early in the morning, at the peak of the noon, or late at night, wrapped in blankets, laid out on a narrow stretcher, borne by bearers who could only walk sideways, Lala Ram Prashad was carried through the narrow passages of the haveli, from one end to another, from one quadrangle to another.

His sons were angry.

'Why do you want to do that?' they asked, when Priya had conveyed his wish to them.

'Aren't you comfortable here?'

Lala Ram Prashad nodded his head.

'Don't you like to see the TV?'

Lala Ram Prashad nodded his head.

'Why do you then want to be wheeled to other parts of the haveli?'

'It is my wish,' transcribed Priya.

'It is my command,' she added after he had spoken again.

It was quite a cavalcade that proceeded through those narrow passages. Everyone had to squeeze through and the stretcher had very often to be tilted to get it across corners or up and down steps. The sons and the grandsons ran in tow, especially the sons, for the sheet of paper and the pen were on the stretcher with Lala Ram Prashad. Priya was there right behind the stretcher; she was the only source of communication with the old man that the clan had now got. It was only since recently that Lala Ram Prashad had become incoherent. Since he was eating no solid food, he wouldn't put the denture in. His cheeks had lost all flesh and were sucked inwards. The tip of his nose had become elongated. His lips had become sealed together. And yet, in any uncanny fashion, Priya at once grasped every word of what he said.

These were the passages through which Lala Ram Prashad once used to walk with the majesty and vigour of a tiger. Stealthily but strongly. His footfall, like that of a tiger, was hardly ever heard but his presence was at once sensed. The women and the children went quiet as they felt him approach and the men held their breath. He said nothing to anyone, he was only on his prowl, just to see how the brood was doing. Passingly he glanced into this quadrangle or that, passingly he sized up a woman who was in the family way, passingly he considered the children that he went by. No one spoke to him, either. For seeking favours from him, for making petitions, other hours were reserved. He too had other hours for rebuking and reprimanding them. At the moment he was on a general tour, relaxed, confident, sensitive, and all-powerful.

Today the same man was being carried through those passages by others. One day he rested in one quadrangle. The next he rested in another. Until it became clear to everyone that it was no mere survey tour, as of old; Lala Ram Prashad was looking for something special. A room was hurriedly cleared for him in the quadrangle where he wanted to halt. And soon as he was propped against the pillows on a bed, he would put on his glasses and start scanning the room. He did that with the precision of a foot soldier – area by area, inch by inch. He closely watched the plaster on the walls, he watched the panelling, he examined the different corners, he prodded the bed he was lying on. And he spent hours on this, until tired he fell back exhausted.

'What are you looking for great-grandpa?' Priya asked, sensing his need.

'The room?' she asked, after he had spoken to her. 'What room?'

'The room!' she said softly, when he gave her the same reply.

The family was puzzled. They speculated amongst themselves. The two sons were certain he had a treasure hidden somewhere.

They took Priya to the quadrangle.

'Priya, ask him what in a room he is looking for. You understand? Not what room, but *what* in a room?'

Priya began to sulk at being handled so roughly by her grandfather.

'Do you understand me?' he asked her, shaking her by the shoulder.

She kept silent and her eyes became wide with fear.

'Arjun,' he shouted for his son.

Arjun came out of the dying man's room into the quadrangle.

'Arjun, Priya is being dumb. Tell her to ask her great-grandpa *what* in a room he is looking for. That's why he is asking up to move him constantly, you can see that, can't you?'

Arjun Prashad nodded his head, though he did not want to alarm his daughter. Besides, he felt sorry they had to push and needle the dying man so hard. Why not leave him in peace?

'Do as your grandfather says,' Arjun told Priya gently.

That worked no better. Priya was unable to elicit anything more from Lala Ram Prashad beyond his enigmatic, 'The room.' Though initially his perambulations in the haveli had begun as a result of the fear that the haveli might be pulled down, the matter had ceased to have any consequence for him shortly. Why bother? Let them pull it down, if they so desire it. But it was in this haveli that he was born, had come into the world he had enjoyed so much. In what room was he perchance born – where had the whole drama begun? He remembered his father once telling him: 'Little fellow, that's where your mother gave birth to you.' And then he took him into the room and said: 'In that corner.' The search now for Lala Ram Prashad had narrowed down to finding that particular room. There were signs. The polished mantlepiece. The bed with posters for the mosquito net. The bed with its legs carved like an elephant's trunks. A side window. A patch on the plaster. Memories drifted back and forth, but he couldn't collate them into a recognizable unit.

He kept hopping around for a couple of days more, scanning rooms, not being able to quite decide. His condition was so grave that his daughters were sent for. His eyes and cheeks went further into his skull and his bony forehead stood out like the top of a light house. His skin had become pastel pale, and a small mole next to the inner corner of his right eye which had been there all these years and which no one had noticed suddenly acquired a distinction for itself; it became the most prominent feature of that pale face. He vaguely recognized his daughters but ignored to bless them. Not willingly, not deliberately, for he was a generous man. He ignored them because he had become a child himself and how could a child bless adults? In the tunnel of time, his mind had taken a complete somersault and gone all the way back. He could not find the room, but he was only a child – a day-old child, just born. What were these clothes doing on him, babies wore no clothes! Taking a knife from the table, he determinedly tried to cut the string of his churidars, to free himself. And he tried hard to wriggle out of his flannel shirt.

They held him down.

'What are you doing, father?' his sons and daughters said one after another.

He returned to being ninety-one, and apart from his daily routine, many other details flooded his mind. The sound of women's bangles on their fair arms. The thumping, dancing feet. The hoot of the Frontier Mail, the fastest train of his younger days. The songs of Kanan and Sehgal. Movies such as 'Duniya Na Mane.' He gloated and gloated over them and then he thought of what lay ahead of him. Darkness. Total darkness. Cobalt blue darkness. And suddenly, suddenly he felt terribly afraid.

He knew very little time was left. They had taken him back to his old room, from where they had started. He found the room packed; there were faces he could not recognize. Arjun tried to remove his glasses but he waved him aside. Most people in the room were grave; many were folding their hands to him, taking his leave. Again Lala Ram Prashad was gripped with tremendous fear. He wanted someone strong near him, someone to hold him as he entered the hereafter, to soothe him and comfort him. He ran his gaze over the faces in the room. No, they were too timid, they were unable to give him any protection. And in his fear his mind wandered again and he began to mumble.

Now Priya began to cry. For she was bent close to him and yet she could make nothing of his mumbling. At the same time, Lala Ram Prashad was fairly insistent.

'What, great-grandpa, what?' asked Priya, weeping, her little hand on the crown of his head. Impulsively, she kissed him on the cheek.

He took her hand in his own and mumbled insistently. And Priya understood.

'Great-grandpa says he wants his mother,' she said to the audience.

A gasp went up from the audience, and someone giggled uneasily.

'His mother!'

No one had ever seen her. No one had ever heard of her. She had died long before any of them was born. Yet out of millions and millions of images in Lala Ram Prashad's mind, she alone swam to the surface at this critical juncture. He had forgotten the group around him, he had even released Priya's hand. She alone, with that mass of black hair, that rounded chin, those large, nut-brown eyes, and that winsome smile, she alone he wanted near him. She alone could give him the prop he needed.

'My mother,' Priya translated for him, weeping.

'He had to play this drama at the end,' whispered one of his sons.

'He has always been theatrical!' whispered the other.

A woman poured some Ganges water down Lala Ram Prashad's throat. Another woman straightened his legs. Another straightened his arms.

'My mother, my mother,' he continued to insist, resisting the women who were twisting him around.

'She's gone down to the market,' one woman spoke close to his ear. Anything to quiet the crazy man.

For confirmation he looked at Priya, who followed nothing of this at all. Everyone had a mother, he must be having one too. Maybe she had never run into her. She nodded her head to him when he turned towards her.

The exit was within sight and Lala Ram Prashad felt utterly lonely. What a shame he couldn't even see her before leaving.

'Picture. Her picture,' he mumbled urgently.

At this many openly laughed. How crazy could one go!

'Show him any picture of a woman. He wouldn't know the difference,' advised someone.

'That's right,' several others joined in.

And they picked up the picture of a bride of the family that was lying on the mantlepiece – the bride of Arjun – and shoved it before him.

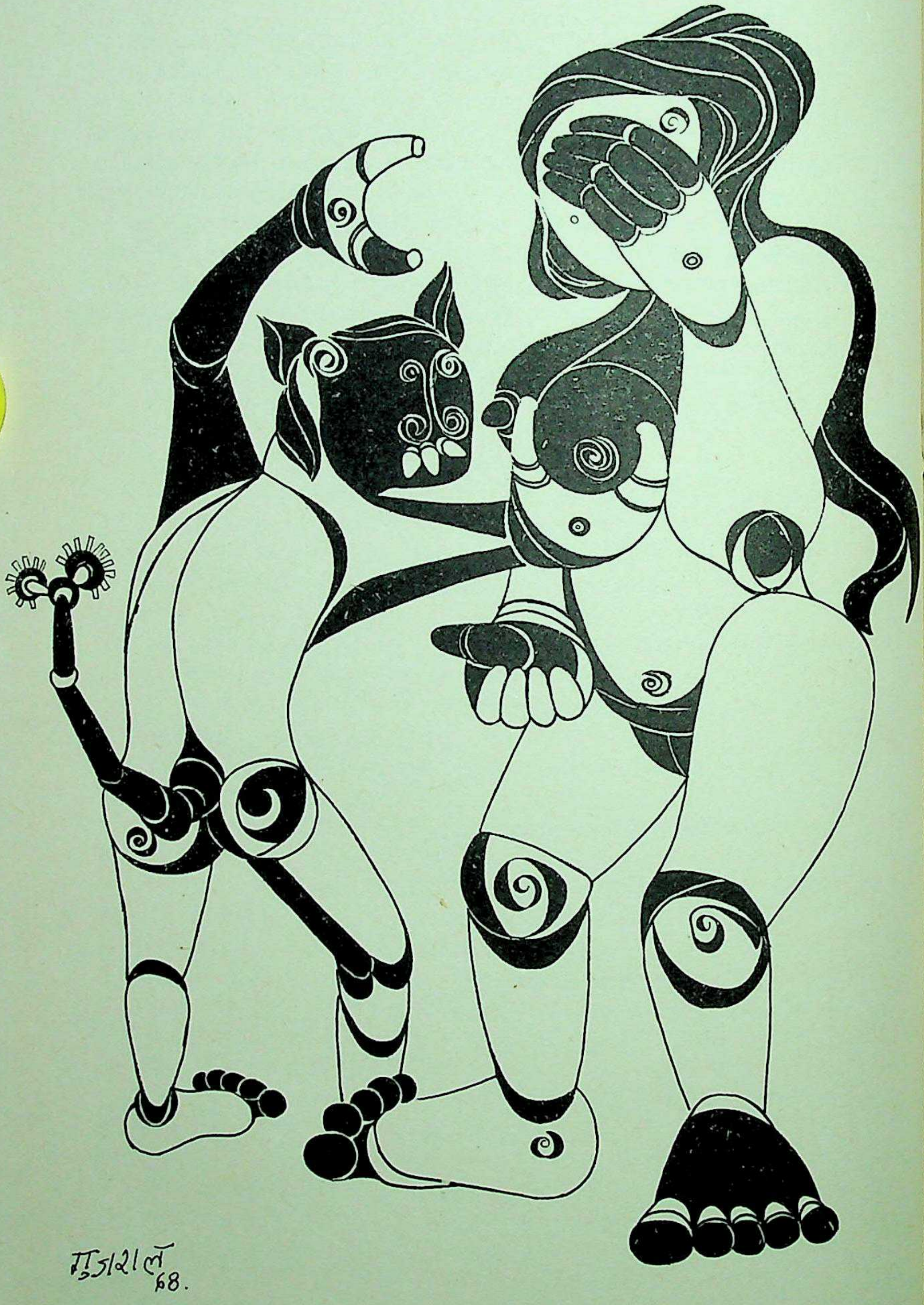
'Here is your mother,' they shouted into his ear.

That was a lie and Priya began to cry loudly. Priya's mother, the subject of the picture, was in the audience and she took Priya to the rear.

'Here is your mother,' they shouted into the lobe of his ear.

With much deliberation, Lala Ram Prashad lowered his neck and tried to concentrate on the picture before him. The water in the pools behind his glasses shifted around and slowly his irises came to rest on the frame. Yes, there she was. His mother. A bedecked and bejewelled beauty – as she always was. So infinitely precious. Such a pillar of strength. She had conceived him in her womb and shielded him until he was ready to face things on his own. Now that he seemed to falter, she offered him the protection of her womb again. A thin smile came on his compressed lips, and all his fears fled. A gladness filled his heart, his breath came softer, his bones went weightless. He kept looking and looking, the lids of his eyes drooping, the smile on his face fixed.

'Take the picture away,' someone said harshly. 'He's gone.'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68.

A Strand of Cotton

Suneet Chopra

Prabhat pushed open the heavy wooden door of his stone hut. It creaked plaintively, as if the petrified dancers carved in its panels had become arthiritics. A grey mist crept in through the opening. He shuddered and drew back. Then he pushed it open again, rubbing his eyes to see more clearly. He needn't have bothered as the air was full of the smoke from forest fires that had burned all night. The feverish activity of the hungry garlands of flames that devoured grass, birds and animals had petered out and what remained were strands of smoke which had cut off the mountain tops from their earthly moorings and left them free to float around in the air.

He walked out onto the stone terrace in front of his hut. There was nothing to see as the mountainside fell away immediately below it. His eye rolled all the way down to the grey band of the Tons river as it rushed to meet the other strands of the Jamuna and Ganga, which would then wind themselves around the broad shoulders of the country like a sacred thread.

It was then that he remembered his own sacred thread. He tugged at it and wound it round his ear. Now he had entered the world of the polluted. He would remain in that state until he had relieved himself and washed himself clean afterwards. The process itself was no different for the untouchable Doms. They too would go a few steps down the rocky hillside ribbed with a criss-cross of footpaths and squat on their haunches behind some gnarled mountain bush. Then they would descend to the riverside to wash. But he, as a Brahmin, had to make an issue of it by hanging the thread from his ear.

Otherwise there was little to distinguish his life and concerns from the untouchables in the village. They were all living from hand to mouth, forcing a few baskets of coarse grain and barley out of the stiff-necked mountain soil. And they were all in debt to local shopkeepers, wholesale merchants and money-lenders.

He began to walk down the hillside. It was bleak and desolate except for a silk cotton tree ablaze with red flowers. Somewhere close by, the bell-like warble of a *bul-bul* surfaced above the murmur of the river, but he barely noticed it. He had worries of his own to occupy him. In some ways the fate of a Brahmin was worse than the others. He had to live up to peoples' expectations as well as make ends meet. Doms could marry three or four times. They could sell their women to the brothels of Delhi and Meerut and live off their remittances. Brahmins could not do that. They had to support their wives as best they could. He sometimes felt he didn't want to be a Brahmin any more.

"Ram Ram, Panditji."

The greeting cut through the opaque air like a knife. He was startled for a moment. Then he made out the almost goat-like nimbleness of a young boy with a ruddy face and a shock of jet black hair as he disappeared into the mist below even before he could recover from the shock. It was Sita Ram, his pupil. He was a Dom. Normally he would have been working on some landlord's field as a debt-bondsman, but as his mother sent money from a brothel in Delhi for his upkeep, his body was strong like a farmer's son. He went to school with the sons of the twice-born and even paid Prabhat for special lessons. But that was the cause of constant bickering in the village.

"How dare you prostitute your wisdom like this?" Ram Singh, the village headman would burst out, especially when he had taken one drink too many, "Don't you remember the example of Drona, the greatest of gurus? When Eklavya the untouchable learnt the art of archery, he took his thumb from him as payment; but you, *our* guru, have educated this Dom further than most of the twice-born in the village. What sort of guru are you?"

"You are playing with dangerous powers, my son," his uncle Jai Narayan Joshi would confide in him whenever matters came to a head, "Do you not know that educating untouchables is a dangerous thing? Was it not necessary for Rama to kill the Shudra, Shambuka, and put an end to his unnatural meditation? Surely you know that. The Ramayana begins with it. And you call yourself a Scholar."

"But I have to live," he used to protest, "None of your sons is interested in studying. All that interests them is wine and women. And Dom women at that. But here is a boy whose mother –"

"See," they would cry out, "Now you are defending your living on immoral earnings, and you a Brahmin."

"Is it living on immoral earnings only when I teach a Dom to read and write? When you take the same earnings as interest on debt or as rent, it is all right. Who is there among the 'respectable' in this village who does not live off the earnings of prostitution?"

The discussion would stop abruptly. The village had lived off the returns of prostitution for the last three generations. In fact, the 'big men' had even taken to farming Dom families as a source of livelihood, but no one spoke of it. And if he had not started teaching Sita Ram, the subject might never have come up at all.

"There is no sense of shame any more," they would say with a sigh, "Nothing remains hidden. Everything comes out in the open almost as soon as it's done. It's because there are no standards left. In the old days, we had children by Dom women and they remained Doms. Today everyone wants to know who his father is. Soon they'll be claiming their share of our property. It's these educated people who are to blame for it. They marry across caste lines and have monstrous offspring. The only law they obey is that of self-advancement. This, indeed, is *Kalyug*."

They would lapse into a morose silence, drawing heavily on an old clay pipe wrapped up in a dirty rag. Then they would exhale the smoke and watch its plumes disintegrate in the crisp mountain air, almost as if they were on the look-out for a vision. At times like these Prabhat could not help thinking why things that did no harm to those who ruled the country should harm him?

They were breaking up inside as well. Like the soldiers who observed no caste rules in uniform, but picked them up when they got home on leave. The soldiers' wages kept the village alive but destroyed its peace with drinking and prostitution. Still, everyone wanted to get his son into the army. Their world was crumbling like the mountains once roads are built. They all wanted roads to be built, even if all the soil were to slide down into the river below....

He made his way down past a couple of poplars that looked like a pair of grass-skirted dancers with bales of hay perched on them.

Dislodged pebbles bounded some distance and then came to rest like he would. There were others too, making their daily round of the riverside, the twice-born with their sacred threads hanging from their ears.

There was Rehlu sitting hunched up behind an outcrop of cactus. Normally he looked formidable: his pug nose and slit eyes set in plump red cheeks bristling with unkempt stubble that always appeared to be a week old. Now he was straining hard. Constipated perhaps. How comic he looked! But not when he drank in the evenings and made his way to the untouchables' quarter. There he would lay his hands on the first woman he could find. No one dared to stop him. Some of the young bloods even admired him. And of course, he was the headman's sword-arm.

Prabhat turned away. Rehlu was offensive, even at his most human, like all these who have traded their being and become mere instruments. He found a cove sheltered by a bush with bright yellow flowers, loosened his dhoti and sat down on his haunches. A small green lizard with a metallic skin eyed him contemptuously as he sat there with the thread tugging at his ear. A honeysuckle alighted on the bush with yellow flowers and wagged its tail at him rudely as if to say, "What a spineless creature! He can't even shit without being dragged by the ear to do it."

The whole natural world was mocking him. He, the Brahmin whose life was no better than that of an untouchable; he who could not even relieve himself without hanging a piece of string from his ear! He suddenly felt angry with himself. Something broke inside him and he pulled the string off. Then he felt sorry he had done it.

"I've done a terrible thing," he muttered, "*A terrible thing*."

The feeling still haunted him when he climbed up the hill from the stream. The gods would exact some unheard of retribution from him. They never allowed transgressions to go unpunished. And if they had, they wouldn't have lasted so long. Yes, he would be punished, but how?

The thread was like a dead weight across his chest now. Something in it had died. That much he knew. But why or how, he couldn't tell. And it troubled him, when his wife brought him rice and lentils in a metal dish he could not eat. Something had changed. He was no longer a Brahmin, he felt. It wasn't something sudden. It had been happening all along only he hadn't been aware of it. Now he was.

"What's wrong?" his wife asked him, "Are you all right?"

So she had noticed it too. It was a sure sign that something had changed. What would she say if he told her the truth? No, that wouldn't do. She would never understand.

"Nothing," he mumbled, "I'm just not hungry today."

"It's a bad time of the year to lose your appetite."

"I know. I'll regain it by evening, I think."

She said nothing. She just looked at him strangely.

The thread was well and properly dead now. It was dank and lifeless. It was the punishment of the gods. He was defiled, defiled forever. But he was shocked at how coolly he took it. He no longer wished to regain that purity. In fact, he wanted to throw it off altogether.

He was horrified at the way his mind was working since the morning. *Vinash Kale Vipreet Buddhi*, the ancients had said. *The mind betrays one at the moment of destruction*. He suddenly felt alone, and instinctively he picked up his copy of the *Bhagwad*. He opened it blindly. It was the eighteenth book, the *Mokshasanyasa Yoga* of deliverance and renunciation. He read it aloud!

"Give me your heart! Adore me! Serve Me! Cling
In faith and love and reverence to me!
And then you'll come to Me! I promise you,
For you are dear to Me!

And let go of those
Rites and writ duties! Fly to Me alone!
Make me your single refuge! Be of good cheer!"

His wife looked at him curiously as he intoned these verses.

But he did not bother. His gods had given him an answer. They had told him there was no refuge for the twice-born in rites and observances any more. That was why the thread had died on him. But where was there refuge? Or was there refuge at all?

"I suggest you see the doctor," his wife said quietly.

"Perhaps I will," he answered, "But first I will give Sita Ram his lesson."

"Oh, the *Dom*."

It sounded like a reproach, but he ignored it. How strange that she could eat food bought with the earnings of prostitution – the money Sita Ram's mother sent as tuition fees – but she couldn't accept him as yet another pupil of his. He might have retorted, but he had learnt to hold his tongue and carry on regardless.

It was past eleven. Sita Ram hadn't come. That was unusual. He must have gone on an errand for his father. But then he would have dropped by and told him. Prabhat wondered if something were wrong. He was getting a little worried now. He wondered if he should walk over to the untouchables' quarter and find out. But then he thought the better of it.

"He hasn't come yet, that Dom of yours."

"I wonder why."

"No need to wonder. The lower orders are all the same."

"But he has never done this before."

"Well he's done it this time. Go and see the doctor now."

"And should he come?"

"I'll tell him to wait."

Reluctantly he got up and dressed. He wound his dhoti round his waist slowly. He wore a cotton shirt and coat over it. He wore a cap on his head. He wrapped himself in a handspun shawl. All the while his eyes were glued to the patch of sunlight at the door, but no smiling face appeared. No voice bursting with energy called out to him from outside.

"You've been waiting long enough. He won't come now."

"My stick."

She handed it to him. Just then he heard footsteps.

So he's come at last, he thought, not without a sense of triumph, *I knew he would.*

"*Guruji! Guruji!*" a voice called out.

It was not Sita Ram. He went out to see who it was. It was his elder brother, with tears streaming down his face.

"What is it?"

"They've killed Sita Ram," he wailed.

"Who?"

"The upper castes."

Anger surged up in him. So that was how the gods had chosen to punish him! In their meanness they had taken an innocent life to teach him a lesson. He restrained himself with some effort. Quietly he asked the man to sit down and tell him what had happened.

"This morning the local representative came to our area. He said there was to be an election. And to start the campaign he called on us to break the ban on our entering the temple."

"I see."

"We were rightly hesitant about it, but he is a leader. So a few of us went with him. But we stopped at the main gate. Then they pushed us in and shouted: *Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai! Long Live Mahatma Gandhi!*"

"And Sita Ram?"

"No, he wasn't there at all. He was preparing his lesson at home."

The thread across his chest was going through the first stages of putrefaction. He felt a wave of nausea break over him. It filled him with a deep sense of disgust. He must have paled, for the other man stopped his narrative.

"I'm all right. Go on," he said with some difficulty.

"Then they left in the land-rover they had come in. Shouting slogans all the way. We were a little dazed at first. Then we went off home."

"And then?"

"Then we shut our doors and waited."

"And Sita Ram?"

"He insisted on going for his lesson. God is my witness. *Guruji*, I begged him not to go, but he said he must. He said he'd given you his word he wouldn't miss a lesson."

"And then?"

"Then they caught hold of him near the temple."

"It was Rehlu, I think, and his gangsters. I could hear his voice ring out clearly: 'I didn't enter, I tell you, I didn't enter!' He kept saying: 'I am innocent! I am innocent!' But someone cried out: 'So was Shambuka!'

Then they all began to beat him mercilessly."

He buried his face in his hands and began to weep.

Prabhat was sickened by the dank snake of a thread wound round him. His hand moved upto his chest and fell back again limply. He thought of when the news would be broken to the ageing painted woman in an upper storey room in Delhi's G.B. Road. He did not want to think any more.

"Yes, and then he said something like: '*Hai Ram! Hai Ram!*'"

Shambuka may well have said that too, he thought bitterly.

"Where is he now?"

"Where he fell, by the temple wall. We haven't let them remove the body. The village assembly is meeting now. I came to call you for that. I felt—", he hesitated for a moment, almost apologetically, "I felt you should see him. You were his *guru* after all."

Then he broke down again. Prabhat's hand rose to comfort him. But it stopped in mid-air. The man was an untouchable. The dead thread clung to his body like a web. It still had the power to paralyse him.

"You did right," he answered firmly, "You go on. I will follow you."

He did not leave. Then Prabhat realised he was afraid. Afraid of whom? Afraid of men who could not relieve themselves without hanging a loop of thread over the ear? But it was no use discussing these things with him. He was irritated. He felt he was being dragged into something against his will. Then he saw his wife in the doorway. She was crying.

"What is wrong?" he asked shortly.

She hid her face from him.

"Go," she said quietly, "Do your duty."

When they reached the temple, most of the men in the village were already there. Someone had brought a sheet and covered up the body. He wanted to see his face, but he did not dare to touch the cloth. He felt they were watching him. Their caps drawn over their foreheads and blankets wrapped round them, they were only pairs of eyes: some slit-like, some wide open, staring at him suspiciously. They seemed to be following his every movement. They appeared to be blaming him. Did they know what had happened that morning? He looked at the head priest of the temple and quickly looked away.

The discussion had begun, so he sat down on the side of the twice-born to listen. There were more untouchables than the twice-born present. But they were huddled up on the far end, which made their number seem much less than they were.

"Our village is known to be one of the most peaceful," the village headman intoned, "And this morning's happening has created an evil climate among us. We too, support the ruling party. The representative Sahib is our man. Does he not have tea at my house when he comes?"

He looked round for support. There was a murmur of approval.

"Just as there are the laws of the country, we have our customs too. They are the rules that govern our daily lives and have done so from the times of our forefathers. Our tasks and duties were divided up when the temple was built. Some participate in the worship inside the sacred room, some in the temple: and some, during the festivals, in processions. For generations we have managed this well and understand the workings of our religion. The people in the towns are different. You wouldn't want *all* their customs to invade our peace, would you?"

He gravely surveyed the gathering with his cool grey eyes. His composure was impressive. One or two old men among the untouchables even muttered: "He's right."

"The representative Sahib is our leader too. But he does not know all our usages. It was the duty of our people to inform him of them. But then, it is not easy to correct big men. That too, I understand, I do not hold anyone responsible for what happened. I myself know how difficult it is to convince big men. If we could have done so, would the living conditions in our villages be as bad as they are? Why, we would have had streets like Dehra Dun and cinemas and a railway station. But we don't."

"Right you are," said a voice from the back of the crowd.

"But that is not the issue before us. A young man of our village has been killed. There are hotheads among youth. Don't we know it?"

The village council nodded. There was a commotion among the untouchables. He frowned for a moment, but regained his composure almost immediately and carried on: "In matters of this sort it is difficult to apportion the blame. Who raised a hand first? Who hit whom and that sort of thing?"

"We've gone over that already," an angry voice from among the untouchables retorted.

There was a murmur of disapproval from the Council members.

"But in matters like these we have to go over things again and again, until they are settled," the headman intoned, unprovoked. "Some say he struck the temple priest, some say he was innocent. We know only that he was surrounded and killed by the mob. We have both versions, so which one are we to believe?"

Prabhat knew the outcome already. He had seen many such scenes before. "I, for one, do not propose to take sides in the matter. One of our people has been killed. He is a son of our village. Can we deny that?"

There was a silence.

"But who has killed him? There must be fifteen here who rained blows on him—or more. If anyone is prepared to name the killer, I am prepared to take the matter up with the police."

No one said a word. It was not surprising. No untouchable would dare to give evidence against Rehlu and his gang.

"I see that no one disagrees with me. So we can settle the matter according to our custom. Manu, our law giver, and the great law giver of all Hindus, has settled the blood-money due to each caste –"

Prabhat felt suffocated.

"The temple priest and the village council know the exact amount—"

"Stop" he cried out all of a sudden.

There were angry exclamations. Someone tried to push him down, but he resisted.

"There is a law in the land," he said, "A law that is the same for all castes. There is no reason to go back to our customary law. And you know we can get into trouble with the authorities for this kind of thing."

"Only if someone makes an issue of it."

"And why shouldn't one? What makes us twice-born? Have you ever thought of it?"

He pulled out the limp thread that hung round his chest.

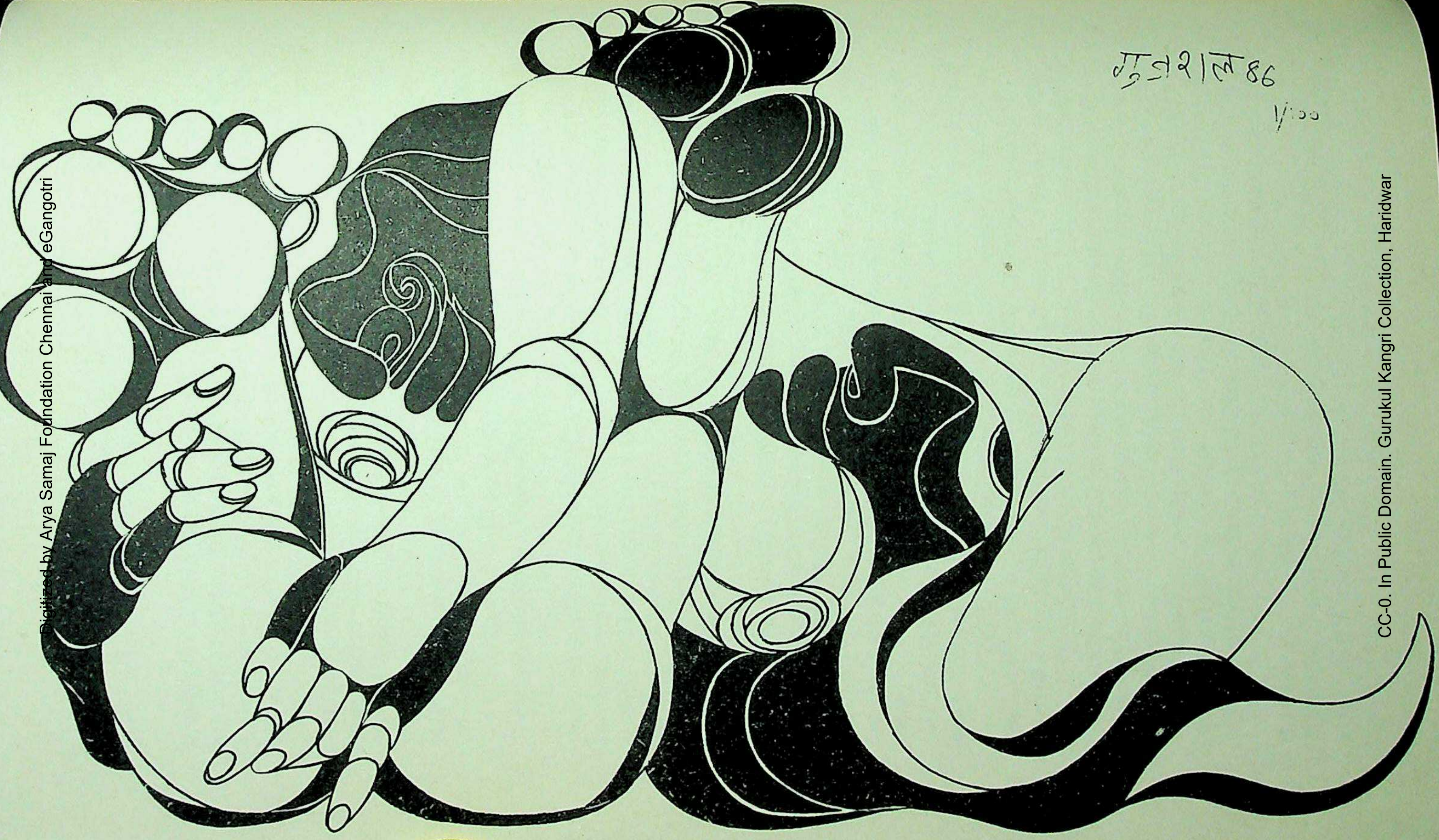
"Just this thread. This is what makes me a Brahmin and Sita Ram an untouchable, isn't it? A piece of thread probably spun by some untouchable in a cotton mill in Kanpur, isn't it?"

"Blasphemy," gasped the temple priest who had given false evidence against Sita Ram, "The Devi will kill you for it."

"I want you to see how little strength is left in your beliefs now," he carried on, "You say the Devi will kill me if I break this thread. I have heard this from childhood. See then if she does."

He pulled the string off and broke it. There was a silence. No one moved. He rolled up the thread and threw it to an untouchable woman sitting by the wall.

"Go and sew your clothes with it, sister. It's more useful that way," he added defiantly. Prabhat felt a new power alive in him. The snake that had died on him in the morning had become irrelevant. He was born again now, without the shackles of caste. The untouchable crowd had swelled. More women had come forward to see what had happened. In fact they had crossed the limit set on them traditionally. No one dared to stop them any more.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BOOK REVIEWS

Mysticism: Sisir Kumar Ghose;
Clarion Books, New Delhi;
Printed pages 328; 1987; Rs 145/-

With Nietzsche celebrating the death of God, Eliot contemplating the earth become a waste land ontologically even more than ecologically, and Beckett waiting for a Godot-Messiah who never comes, if ever man had an interiority, it has become a void today. Most myths of man link his origin with the gods. The long descent from the peaks, Olympus or Kailasa, where the gods dwell to the slough of despond which is the world of today is now being increasingly studied and analysed, and with a sense of desperate urgency too, because the realisation has dawned that unless we start to climb back to the peaks and peak experience, within a few decades we may be wiped out as the monstrous dinosaurs were wiped out long ago as a species unfit to exist.

The diagnosis of the diminishment of man runs today into hundreds of studies. But briefly: man looked out, at the world "out there", initially perhaps purely out of a poetic urge but very soon exclusively from the Baconian perspective which equated knowledge with power; gradually forgot that what was discovered out there was found out by a self looking out; and at last denied more and more truculently that there was a self within that was looking at the world without. In this Dadaist, fantastically self-contradictory stance of exploiting the world of nature and fellow human beings and giving them as burnt offering at the idol of the self and at the same time denying the self, many perceptions perished, perceptions absolutely essential for man not only for realising the highest values in existence but even for continuing to exist. For these perceptions were insights – perhaps only sensed by the heart at first but capable of substantiation today if only scientism can become true science – into a benign order, Rita, Logos, Tao, which guaranteed both survival and self-fulfilment for man.

With the obstinate and sustained denial of the perceptions, however, man confronts the possibility of an imminent end, either by getting cindered in the crater of a nuclear bomb, or by starving to death because the life-support resources of the world are used up in an orgiastic consumerism, or by suffocating to death in a planet reduced to a dung-hill with its land, water and air polluted to lethal toxicity. This is why Hans Jonas said that the transcendent and the urgent have become one. For if man does not recover his lost dimension, which he had sensed and conserved in myth and has today to be substantiated by all the resources of integrative thought, his race and its history will be lost without a trace in the annals of the evolution of the universe of mere matter with no remembrance of the radiant possibility of matter being transfigured as spirit that was very much there but was betrayed.

Sisir Kumar Ghose's book is an invocation for this new commencement. Its ardent mood is that of the Mantra, of the Gayatri or *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, which sensed light pouring out from beyond the earth's horizon and opened out the heart to receive its radiance in full. His is the convictional language which, as defined by Zurdeeg, is basic to religion and poetry and not only expresses the fact that it is grounded in a conviction or a commitment but also that the person who speaks it understands himself to be 'convicted', that is, to be grasped by that to which he gives himself. And since Ghose commands a poetically nuanced and most sensitive style, the book has the impact of creative literature though its approach is descriptive and analytical.

Josiah Royce had the courage to affirm that the mystic is probably the greatest of realists. Ghose also is convinced that mysticism is not a religion without knowledge, that it is not merely a matter of feeling, but it is a knowledge, rather wisdom not opposed to science; the supra-rational need not be the irrational. Here we are reminded of the great sequence in the Gita where Krishna equates himself with all the best entities, pursuits and disciplines in the world and affirms that of all the sciences he is the science of the self. Ghose feels that a civilisation of consciousness, a society fit for souls, is the promise of mysticism. This, again, is the divinisation of history envisaged in the last verse of the Gita and the condition of its realisation is that man freely resolves to become a partner of God for realising the divine programme in creation.

But man, God and the world can be integrated thus only by a synthesis of empirical knowledge in the light of wisdom. Certitude (*astikya*) can be won only through the integration of knowledge (*vijnana*) and wisdom (*jnana*), affirmed the Gita; and its own reconstruction covers the whole reach from the physics of the particle to the science of the psyche. His work being a collection of essays and reviews written over many years and on different occasions, Ghose himself has asked us not to expect a systematic treatment of the subject and he has mentioned the many questions that remain. "How is the timeless moment fitted into time?... Are mystics conformist or outsiders? Does the variety of mystical experience – prehistoric, the ancient Mysteries, Hindu, Buddhist, Greek, Christian, Islamic, Zen and others – represent a common pursuit? Or are there differences here too? What about the doctrines, the disciplines? What would be the nature of mysticism in a scientific, industrial society? How is the mystic to be related to society?"

As one who was requested by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to contribute the entry on mysticism, Ghose's credentials in this subject are the highest and I would still like to see him help us with a systematic treatment of mysticism, for there are many more questions to be answered and points to be cleared. Introvertive mysticism can be the polar opposite of extrovertive mysticism in its preference of the One which is nothing to the One which is All. The claim that the self of man is an unreal appearance of the Absolute does not look to me to be much different in its implications than scientism's claim that man is a fortuitous and determined product of natural processes without any capacity for self-determination. Ghazali may be right in affirming that many mystics mistake the ecstasy of union for identity with the Absolute. And there is the even more unhappy fact that many in the east and west, Sankara as well as St. John of the Cross, have claimed that mystical union with the Absolute precludes work for the weal of the world. The Gita said the exact opposite and so did Christ and people like Hugo of St. Victor.

Meanwhile, Ghose's statement that the compilation does not add up to a systematic study is more unduly modest than it need have been. There is no danger that the mystic flight into the empyrean will make him forget the earth. He quotes Merton: "The twentieth century monk who has not meditated on Auschwitz does not know the meaning of meditation or of his own times." And he recalls what Sartre and Viktor Frankl learned from the suffering of the Nazi occupation and the concentration camps. This reinforces my plea to him for a comprehensive study, for the mystic tradition in this country has been deaf to the plangent outcry of the world while Ghose sees the meaning of the tears at the heart of things, senses with the Gita that *prabhava*, the origination of finer things, must have a prelude in *pralaya*, the destruction of the old, that the Old Adam has to die before the New Man, as St. Paul, Tillich and Ramanuja understood the concept, can be born.

Krishna Chaitanya

In Worship of Shiva:
Shaṇta Rameshwar Rao;
Illustrated by Badri Narayan;
Orient Longmans;
Printed pages 175 with 14 colour plates; 1986; Rs 225/-

It would be a pity to describe this as a coffee-table book, though in dimension and number of illustrations, including abundant line-drawings and 14 colour plates, it would appear to set out to conquer by ostentatious display. It would be a pity, because the text is charmingly written, in simple unstylised English, that is intelligible to readers of all ages.

There is no indication that the stories are intended primarily or even exclusively for children, but there is some indication in the studied clarity of the text, the distinctively Indian folk illustrations and the elaborate production, that it is intended for the affluent foreign reader. This is the more likely since the book's publication was synchronised to appear while the Festival of India in the US was still news, and somewhat before the curtain rose on the Festival of India in the USSR. By making its appeal to the foreign reader who is not knowledgeable in Indian myth, but does realise that legends such as these embody the underlying continuing values of a civilization, the book was likely to be a good, if not a best-seller.

The predominant figure, as the title indicates, is Shiva, and several myths use him for inspiration and as an emblem of irresistible power. Among the more attractive of these is the legend entitled *The Marriage of Shiva* that immortalises Sati, independent-minded daughter of the arrogant Daksha, and tells the story of how in atonement for her father's insult to her husband, Shiva, Sati flung herself into the flames of the sacrificial fire and so died. Shiva's mourning for his beloved is moving, as he wanders into the wilderness crying her name and seeking her everywhere. This part of the story recalls Orpheus and Eurydice of Greek mythology.

In the sequel *In Worship of Shiva*, Sati is re-born as Uma. All the legends contain a strong element of conflict, which may possibly account for their continuing attraction in our more sceptical times, and for their power to hold all people of all ages. Conflict is here embodied in the demon Taraka who first scoffs at Shiva and Uma's childlessness and then seeks to destroy their small son, Kartikeya. Wisely, Uma entrusts her son "tinier than a grain of sand" to her elder sister Ganga, who hides and protects him while a baby, from all danger. But Kartikeya grows to be so dazzling that no one can hide him any longer and in due course he challenges the demon Taraka to battle, slashes Taraka's head with his flashing sword and then triumphantly enters swarga.

Throughout the book's ten

legends, there are reminders and echoes of parallels with Greek mythology, for the two systems have much in common in the plurality of their Gods, the divine hierarchy, the passionate attachment of Gods to other Gods and Goddesses, as well as to men and women. But there are of course differences, too. The story of Savitri and Satyavan, for instance, is a close parallel of the Greek myth of Admetus and Alcestis, but in the Hindu legend it is Savitri's wit (as well as her constancy) that outmanoeuvres Yama, God of Death, whereas in the Greek legend Heracles (Hercules) has to intervene to bring Alcestis back to earth and Admetus. Both myths celebrate the self-sacrificial attribute of the traditional wife, and make the point that love such as theirs conquers death.

Yama, a parallel with the Greek Thanatos, is always interesting and complex and appears and reappears in these ten legends. Like Thanatos, he is the instrument of Fate, whose behests he is bound to carry out, but he is not two-dimensional for he can feel a certain sympathy for women like Savitri. Later, in his tussel with Shiva over the life of Markandeya, he is able to establish, by biding his time, that Death is not the unmixed calamity that human beings may think it is. All Hindu, like all Greek myths on Death, were apparently planned to prove that in the last resort Death *explains* life. If Death were eliminated men and women would value life less.

There are other respects in which Hindu and Greek legends differ and one interesting aspect is that a Greek immortal, as his/her name indicates, cannot die – an unmixed blessing. Whereas Hindu Gods and Goddesses are not so invulnerable: they can and do die.

In the battle between the Gods and the Asuras (a parallel with the Greek Gods and the Giants) the Gods generally get the better of the Asuras (*The Two Demon Brothers*), but though the story leads up to the defeat and death of Hiranyakashipu, it closes with the overriding clemency of Vishnu who transforms conflict into understanding, enmity into love. There are, indeed, times in reading this collection, when one wishes that Vishnu would appear more often.

Badri Narayan's folk designs are likely to impress foreign readers even more than ourselves, who are accustomed to the mythic power of these seemingly static images with their wide-eyed sculptured wonder, and their Egyptian-like stance. Indeed, these designs with their calculated symmetry, recall the beginnings of draughtsmanship in the long story of human painting the world over.

Muriel Wasi

Barahmasa in Indian Literature: Songs of the Twelve Months in Indo-Aryan Literature:
Charlotte Vaudeville;
Motilal Banarsidass;
Printed pages 139; 1986; Rs 70/-

It is hard to know precisely to whom this book is addressed. It is clearly put together by a meticulous French scholar, Charlotte Vaudeville, whose field of scholarship is the folk part of Indian culture. A Foreword by the well-known sociologist, T.N. Madan, is useful both because it illuminates the sociological aspect of the folksongs and touches on the paradox that though Indians have little precision in their concept of linear time, they are obsessively preoccupied with the flux of seasonal time.

All these folksongs, many of them attractive, are pivoted round the twelve months of the Hindu year. They tell of food and drink, of the agricultural cycle, the observance of religious festivals, of the longing of the wife for her husband, from whom for seasonal reasons she has been separated. These last are in short love songs, songs of longing.

Now, all this is useful to scholars of folklore and the Indian vernaculars. There are no known examples of *barahmasas* in Sanskrit. The songs are still prevalent in Bengal and Gujarat and would seem to be popular in rural communities in northern India. The collection is useful to sociologists and, up to a point, to travellers in various parts of northern India who are fascinated by deeply-rooted folk traditions. But charming as the songs are because they recall the seasons vividly and give lonely rural wives something to sing about plaintively while their husbands are away, there is no compelling reason why the modern common Indian, or other reader in English, should more than glance at such a collection. Yet foreign scholars, including Vaudeville, appear to have spent time and talent going into the *barahmasa* in Bengali and Gujarati and in analysing the various kinds and themes of such folksongs that have come down to us through the centuries.

Here is a sample of a *barahmasa* by Mirabai in old Braj-Rajasthani:

O my Beloved,
grant me the vision of Yourself;
Again and again I call on You;
have pity on me – Ho!
In the month of Jeth (May-June),
for want of water,
the bird is in pain – Ho!
In Ashadh (June-July), the peacock throws its cry
And the Chatak-bird too calls the cloud – Ho!
In Shravan (July-August), the rain falls hard,
and my friends play the *Tij* – Ho!
and so on right through the twelve months of the year.

There are *Nagari* transliterations of the songs, a carefully compiled glossary, and a bibliography – so clearly someone takes all this very seriously. Its chief contribution to my pleasure was that it taught me the names of the months of the Hindu almanac – all resonant and memorable – Chaitra, Baisakh, Jeth, Ashadh, Shravan, Bhadra (Bhadon), Ashvin, Karttik, Agahan, Paush, Magh and Phalgun – and forced me to wonder why there were no plaintive traditional folksongs to be sung by *men* during the periods of separation from their women. Why is the *barahmasa's* plaintiveness exclusively feminine?

Muriel Wasi

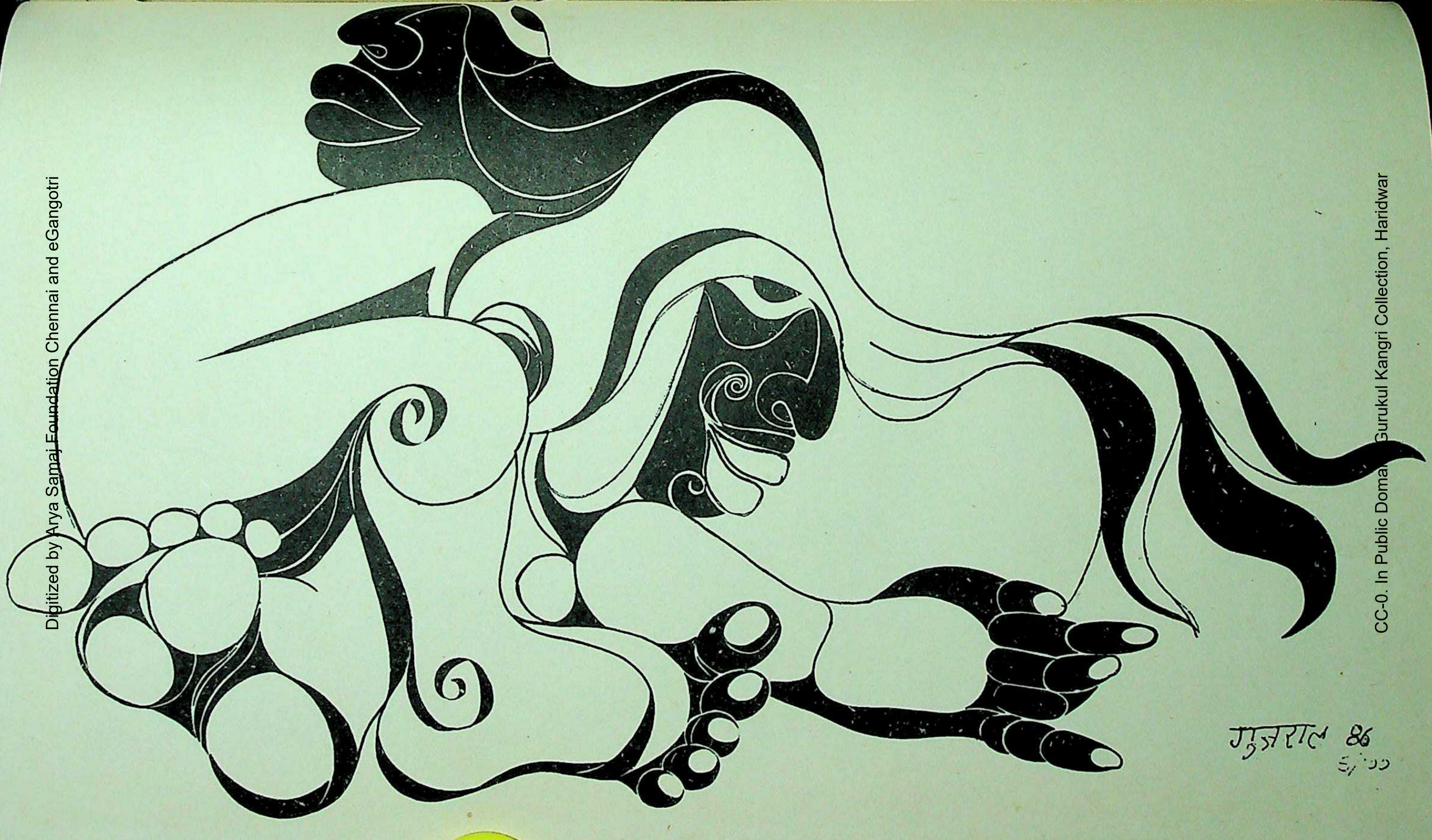
A Death in Delhi: Translated and edited by Gordon C. Roadarmel; Penguin India; Pp. 211; 1988; Rs 45

This is a collection of 15 short stories translated from Hindi by a professor of near eastern languages. The dozen and more writers represented in this novel came into prominence in the nineteen fifties and sixties and their work helped to bring the short story genre into prominence. It is surprising that the short story developed only in the 20th century in India, a country where fables and stories have always played an important part.

The stories in this book deal mainly with the mental states of individuals in an urban middle-class setting. They tend to portray loneliness and estrangement, social disruption, urban anonymity, bureaucratic indifference and a general loss or absence of individual identity.

Many Indian readers are familiar only with Premchand's stories, written in the first three decades of the century, which expose weaknesses in the cultural, economic; religious, and social system, but which retain a strong faith in many traditional virtues and patterns of life. However, the characters in these stories are cut off in some way from traditional securities of family and community and are left drifting, groping, aware of an emptiness but unable to identify the sources of misery or to act effectively to relieve their inner suffering. A mood of helplessness is pervasive, an awareness of feelings and emotions but with little expectation that anything can be changed. Pursuit is a common theme, and the victim a frequent character. The impotence of the individual against the forces of society is perhaps a universal theme of fiction today, but these stories provide unusual insights into both the common and the unique elements of the modern Indian experience.

This is a good collection of recent Hindi stories to have appeared in English. It has an adequate glossary and fairly detailed notes on the authors.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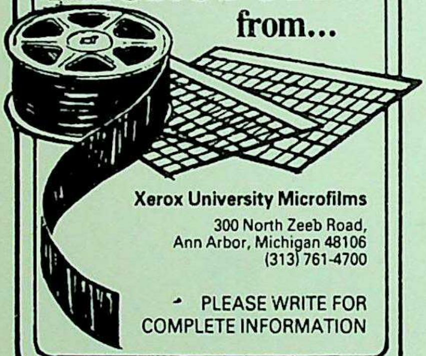

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Editor: A Srinivasan

Handicrafts of Tamilnadu

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

Tamilnad has a rich and resplendent tradition in handicrafts going thousands of years back. Excavations of the pre-historic period reveal the existence of textiles of the neolithic and chalcolithic times. Tamil is considered the oldest of the Dravidian languages, and had naturally even a longer earlier period of oral tradition when compositions were sung or chanted and stories narrated. In these there are references to handicrafts. Even in the Sangam classics assigned to a period between 250 B.C. and A.D. 250 there is mention of fabrics and other allied crafts which formed part of the large merchandise of early trade not only with other parts of India, but also with lands across the wide oceans.

These are enumerated later by Kautilya in his Arthasastra as articles coming from the southern region. These include heavy jewellery in gold and precious stones, blankets 'black and as soft as the surface of a polished gem', and fine cottons from Madurai.

The early Tamil idylls like Perumbanarrappadai, Pattupatu, Mullaipattu, Maduraikanchi, etc., give evidences of a flourishing urban civilization in centres like Madurai, Uraiyur, Kaveripatnam, Kanchi, etc., where lived men versed in the Shilpisastras. The shilpisastra followed here was Mayamatha, the Sastra favoured by the Tamils of the day. One of the grandest of the Tamil epics Silappadikaram, considered as belonging to the close of the Sangam age and the Kalabhra interregnum, placed at the end of 5th and early 6th century A.D. contains elaboration of the temple crafts and architecture, the images, jewels, ornaments, conographic descriptions of deities, etc.

Maduraikanchi while describing Madurai city in graphic terms, shows us the artisans at work on conch shells and pearls, two products which attained great renown during the Pandyan rule. The conch shell articles were made by cutting the conch and turning the discs over a lathe for shaping circles for bangles, rings, earrings, etc. and then carving on them. In the old texts they are called sangaruppor. The story goes that some of these artisans migrated to Bengal and set up this industry there. The Idyll further describes a large variety of craftsmen at work such as florists, perfumers and painters whose subtle modes of laying on colours almost gives the illusion of the figures in the picture moving.

Similarly the Pattinappalai describes the crafts flourishing in the city of Kaveripatanam near the sea. One sees almost a sea of faces, thousands of hands and arms briskly moving, some preparing colours, some dying, others embroidering on fine silk or cotton or doing applique, lapidiaries, stringing corals, agate and pearls, setting gems, carving on sandalwood and conch shell, making garlands of flowers both natural and artificial ones out of fabric or pith, etc. There are also carpenters, cobblers, metal workers, black-smiths.

Idylls like Silappadikaram present the theatre crafts by describing the folk dance dramas, showing various episodes and characters from the epics, and describing them in detail. The theatre crafts of the south are amongst the richest not only in this country but anywhere in the world.

The temple crafts of Tamilnadu are equally rich and unique. Their evolution seems to have begun with that of the temples themselves. Early Tamil literature talks of the temples of the Sangam age many of which obviously crumbled, having been of perishable materials. Tamil classics like Pattupathi however refer to architects well versed in the building art, religious as well as secular. The Temple builders—Nulari pulavar—later attained phenomenal skill and Silappadikaram describes the temples as though they were like sky scrapers, when it says they were 'jostling with the clouds'.

The beginning of shrines and making of images for worship really goes back to the early days when people lived in small communities, and the deities were local and they ruled over only their own villages. Many of them were female. The prevalence of the fertility cult may be responsible for this. These shrines are made of mud and of ordinary bricks with a thatched roof or the images are set up on a clay platform under a tree. The images are made of clay by the ordinary potters. They are in folk style and symbolic in appearance, highly embellished with a variety of decorations, also in clay. These are generally made by women with great care and devotion like a ritual. The deities they represent are mostly regarded as protectors against evil spirits, diseases or wild beasts. A village hero who served to protect the village against onslaughts also became enshrined amongst them. These clay deities are found in a fascinating variety, often with horses, elephants, bulls and dogs. Some are enormous and in life size, 7 to 8 feet in height. What is of interest is that they have continued down to the present day in the same folk form side by side with the highly sophisticated classical images in wood and bronze which later became one of the glories of Tamilnadu. They are cast hollow with kneaded clay laid on a straw model, with vent holes at suitable points; decorated externally by incised marking, thumb nail decorations and applique ornamentation, and fired as a whole. When the combustible internal mould burns away, flames and smoke find their outlet through the vents. These are renewed and reconsecrated periodically, for they perish very soon. There are also figurines called Matalai added as votive offerings.

Perhaps the earliest man-made embellishment is cloth. The Purananuru, a very early collection of 400 poems on kings, polity and wars, refers to spinning as generally done by women. Weaving is named as Karukavinoi and the weaver Karukar. In Silappadikaram a wide variety of textiles are mentioned in different contexts, and poetically described. For instance fabrics such as Tukil, Kalingam, Adai are likened to the inner lining of the bamboo, the vapour of milk, the rays of the full moon, so fine were they. The variety is too large to be fully enumerated, being nearly 40 in number.

Tukil was always worn in white and considered auspicious, and referred to as mangala. Tukil Kalingam was in many colours and according to the Ahananuru, worn by a bride. There were also bolts of yardage cloth called Arunai and Tuni, also in fine weave.

Silk fabrics were said to have the appearance of Katiri-pu-flower, as stated in the Perunkatai. There is in the Silappadikaram, description of a silk chaddar with elaborate flower designs. The Pattinappalai pictures a moonlight party with women clad in silk clothes while Maduraikanchi talks of the aristocrats of the city driving in chariots clad in silk.

There is also reference in several texts to 'eli-mayir-adai', which was a warm wrap made from the soft fur of an animal said to be coloured like coral Indra Kopa. Apart from dying and ordinary printing of cloth, more complicated processes were employed for decorating textiles, such as the use of wax for resist print, lac, tie and dye, where the cloth is tied into little knots and the different parts dyed in different shades, batik, Kalamkari (painting scenes and figures on cloth) etc. The Yapparangalam commentary mentions a treatise on textiles called Adai Nul which is said to be very ancient. One of these verses also talks of special supervisory officer called Kachchadai-ayattan, to look after the textile industry.

A great art of the time and one which throws light on the life and crafts of the day was painting. A treatise on the art of painting called 'Oviyancel' contains complete details on every aspect of it. Temple walls were covered by these fine paintings with mainly epic scenes. Every temple had its mandap (a pavilion) and every palace of chitrashala that is, picture saloon. The Paripadal calls this eluttunilai-mandapam. From early literary contexts one knows that the deity of that time in the temple was a wall painting or a painted stucco relief or a painted wooden carving. There were also brush drawings in outline without colour filling, called punaiya oviyam, described in the epic Amnekali. While the earlier temples made of perishable material was destroyed, the later ones especially in the rock-cut temples from 7th century A.D. have survived and bear ample testimony to their excellence. Some of the fine ones can be seen at Kailasnath temple at Kanchi; the Siva temple at Tirumalaipuram (Tirunelveli district): and the celebrated Pandya paintings at Sittannavasal. Above all are the master-pieces of the Chola period, 11th century in Brihadisvara temple in Thanjavur.

They seem to have continued down to the late 19th century. The technique of painting followed is the "Limemedium", the "fresco buono" or "fresco seccs" process as contrasted with the tempera or dry surface paintings in other parts of India such as Ajanta Bagh, etc. This technique of painting with mineral colours on wet lime surface or mixed with lime and water, required extreme quickness and firmness, as well as deftness of hand in covering large surfaces as found in the places mentioned. While in tempera, painting is on dry surfaces employing mineral colours mixed with suitable adhesives. The adept outline and firm brush work, the body colouring, relief and modelling, the fine features and other refinements, reveal the skill and mastery of the painters. The subjects show a wide range from gods, goddesses, men, women, dancers and musicians to dwarfs, goblins, animals, plants and flowers. Large pieces of cloth were also painted with similar scenes. The cloth had to have a primary coating of bees wax before laying on the colours. It was called Kalamkari.

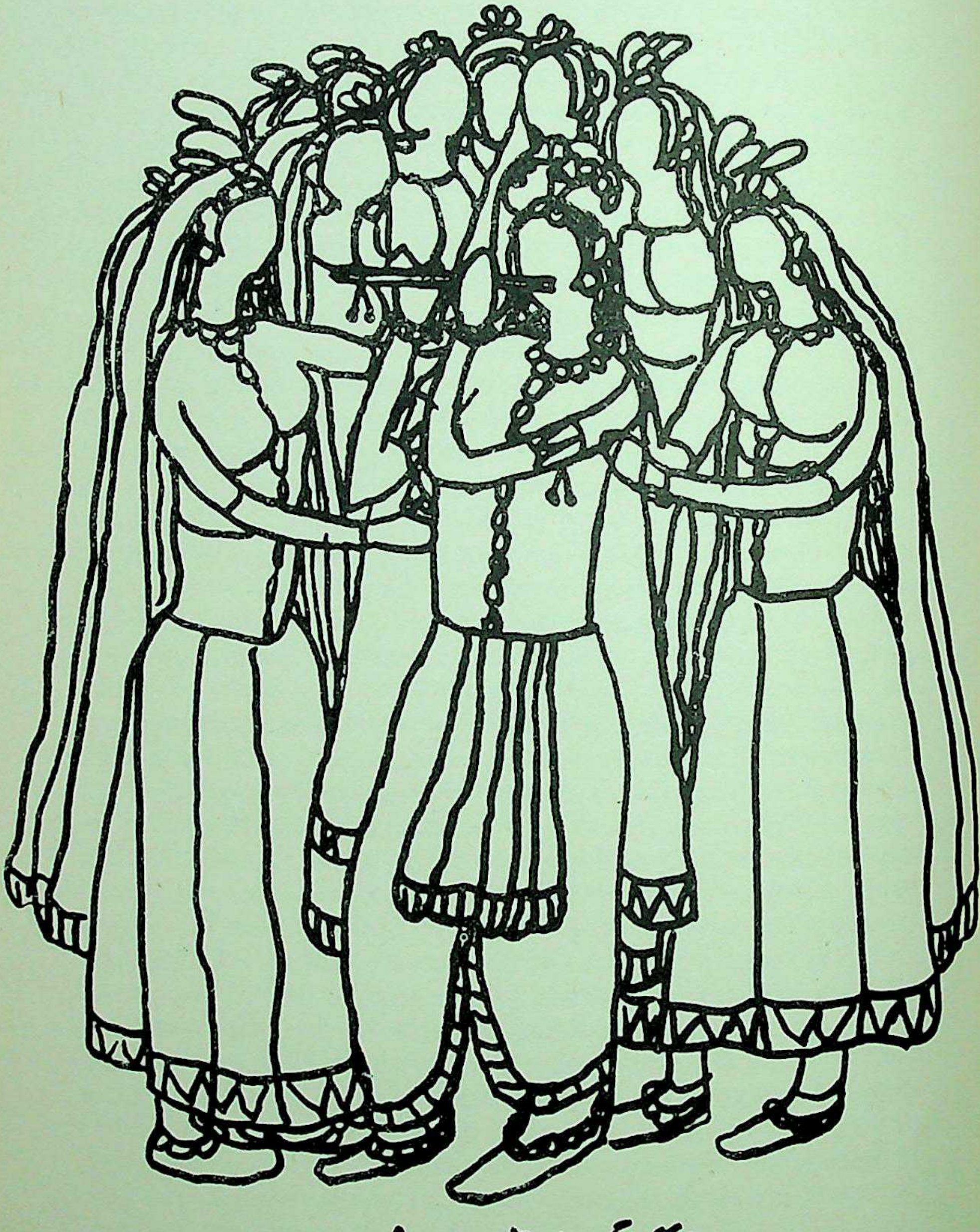
All these paintings throw a flood of light on the life of that period and show a range of contemporary crafts, architecture, furniture, textiles, jewellery. One sees for instance a queen's couch carved in ivory with embossed metal plate, the canopy posts lacquered brilliantly, while the canopy is embroidered and printed with the sun and zodiac signs. It has a hem of looped pearl garlands and festoons to finish off.

Wood and ivory carving too flourished in very fine form from earliest times. Temple crafts especially gave scope for them as one can see from the doors, door frames and lintels, the carved chariots, palanquins, etc. Turned wood and lacquered articles are mentioned in Sirupanarrup-padai, mainly toys, dolls, caskets, furniture pieces, etc. It also describes vividly different types of boats with the prow or stem shaped like the head of a horse, elephant, lion etc. Similarly carved chariots and palanquins are exuberantly described, all testifying to the superb workmanship. Soft wood like the Morinda and Wrightia, fine woods like teak and rosewood, hard woods like Mimusops (Palai) Mahua, were all used. Even the very ordinary articles of common use were decorated with designs and inlay, especially of metal. Iron plating of doors for example were given a rust proof coating of red lead in mustard oil.

The Silappadikaram has also described the artisans at work on jewellery. A very popular ornament was the anklet, a very characteristic jewel of the women, made in numerous ways. In those days, pieces of gem-like ruby, coral, pearl were placed inside the hollow of this ornament, according to the status of the wearer. One text describes a golden anklet or Kudaichchul, set with a crest jewel and a line of diamond inlay and delicately embossed with picturesque designs. At the waist the garment was held by the mekalai of different makes, while below it hung a girdle of string pearls, coral and gems, called Kurangu-Seri. These gems were polished but not cut or faceted and set "encabochon". This was done to enhance the mass cffect of the setting in different colours, the convex faces of the gems reflecting subdued light of diverse hues against the golden background, lending an unusual beauty to the piece. There were a large variety of ear ornaments like Olai Todu, Kulai, Valayam, Vali in different shapes; countless necklaces, bangles, bracelets, wristlets, armlets, hair ornaments in the shape of the sun and crescent moon, a long piece to cover the plaited hair. These and more enumerated in inscriptions are described in the idylls and ancient narratives.

South Indian bronze images and icons attained lasting renown. They were earlier made by the cire perdu process, popularly known as the lost wax process. Some of the finest forms both in elegance and dignity and in infinite forms were to be found in the metalware of every day use like cooling and serving vessels, storage vessels, plates, tumblers, bathroom vessels, and a host of others in brass, bell metal and copper, all of which enriched the daily life of the humblest.

It is said that in the earlier period, clay articles were much more in use. But over centuries now metal has been in vogue. One of the grandest items in mental is the Indian lamp. Its variety is too large to be enumerated. For each occasion a different lamp was used. Particularly in the southern temples one saw a large array of them. The Sangam works describe some of the very unusual ones like the Pavai Valakku, or lamp held by a damsel and Otima Vilakku, a swan shaped one. The latter was supposed to be hung on the top of the ships mast.



Bhagat. 10.5.80

A Heritage of Oneness

Shridath S. Ramphal

You have honoured me by the invitation to inaugurate this Series of International Conferences 'The Genesis of a Nation', and to deliver the plenary address at this First Conference on 'The Origins and Development of the Indo-Guyanese'.* It is an honour, and a special privilege, because these Conferences are more than a commemoration of things past; they must be a herald of fresh endeavour, perhaps ready to show itself in us, awaiting only articulation in such discourses as we begin today to give it permanence in our society.

This process of examining Guyana's roots—as distinct from, though obviously in the context of, the roots of its several peoples—is a quintessential element in our nation-building. That is why the title of this series—The Genesis of a Nation—is so apt. It looks to the beginnings of the wholeness of Guyana not merely to the beginnings of the different elements within its society. This must be the central thrust to all you do together here in May and later in July. That it has taken over 150 years to embark on such discourses in an integrated way is itself a measure of the significance of this occasion.

But while I applaud unreservedly the timelessness of these Conferences emphasising the nation's beginnings, let me admit to a personal reservation over the labels 'Indo-Guyanese' and 'Afro-Guyanese'. I know they are a kind of transit station on the way from calling ourselves (and thinking of ourselves) as 'Indians' and 'Africans'; I wonder, however, whether we have not travelled far enough already along this terminology path to have become simply 'Guyanese': Guyanese, it is true, whose ancestors came at different times, in different boats, from different places; who all acknowledge and honour those ancestral links and treasure the cultural variety that is their heritage; but Guyanese whose shared experience of finding ourselves for so long in the same boat has now subsumed those separate origins in an inseparable common identity. Indeed, it may be easier less jeopardous, to talk of those separate origins, as we will do in this Series of Conference from a position of assurance that, 150 years later, we have indeed arrived at the national identity.

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*Paper delivered at the Genesis of a Nation Conference held in Georgetown, Guyana, 1988.

*That identity is in fact no longer an optional matter. As we explore, now and in July, the pathways that brought us to Guyana, it must be our basic premise—axiomatic and incontestable—that we all belong to Guyana and our West Indian region, and belong to nowhere else. Africa and India, both expect us to be first and foremost Guyanese. They know that Guyana is now the land of our ancestors; that to be true to ourselves we must first be true to the inheritance they bequeathed us of belonging to Guyana. And not only do they know this as an historical fact, they also value it as a present reality—one that allows new strengths to emerge for the Third World as a whole from our success in nation-building here. Africa and India share our need to make our several origins the genesis of a united Guyanese nation. As we relive the past in this commemoration, let us not mistake it for the present or the future.

And there are further acknowledgements to make as we begin this process of reminiscence about Guyana's genesis. The first must surely be the reminder that 'in the beginning' were Guyana's Amerindian people. In slavery and indenture lay the genesis of modern Guyana; but there were other beginnings. This is an ancient land—as our Timheri figures bear witness—and here on the 'wild Guiana coast', before others came from Europe and Africa and Asia, dwelt its indigenous people. There once were other, earlier societies. As a nation that has come to freedom out of colonialism, with our common experience of subjugation and alienation, it is specially incumbent on us not to be guilty of the arrogance of implying that our Guyana world began with us. It would be even worse to believe this; for then we would not merely be ignoring the historical wrong done to those who were the victims of dominion before we were, we would be giving legitimacy to that wrong and making ourselves mimic men and women of our own oppressors.

And we must acknowledge, too, in no less unambiguous a manner, that while from Africa and India came the majority of Guyana's people, others came as well: from Europe and from China in particular. Britain and Holland shaped the beginnings of our nation as imperial powers and in governance that went beyond proprietorship; but Portuguese and Chinese came to labour and stayed on to belong and, in belonging, to contribute in notable ways to the nation's evolution. They, too, are part of its genesis. If, because of the commemorative structure of this series, Guyanese of Portuguese and Chinese origin are not spoken of as specifically as others, let it be clear from the outset that this does not signify a lapse either of memory or of judgement.

And, lest it go unsaid, let it be acknowledged as well that many contributed to the process of nation building who do not today fit into neat categories of provenance. Guyanese evolved from those who crossed the original ethnic lines have helped in fundamental ways to shape Guyana's character as a nation. That cross-ethnicity is the ultimate reminder that no one community has paramount claim to Guyana's past on referential title to Guyana's future. In time we shall all assuredly be one—whatever our beginnings or the instincts that seek to rule our ends. Much of what I have to say today is rooted in the perception that not 'otherness' but 'oneness' must be the hallmar of this commemoration: not difference, but sameness: not our time of arrival or the nature of the journeying, but the reality of our being here and the mutual need of living together.

In what follows in these Conferences there will be many opportunities to look in depth at particular aspects of indenture and slavery and, in the process, to enrich still further the treasury of scholarship that already exists.[1] Such is not my ambition. I should like more modestly to set the scene for your discourses with some reminders of the overarching unity that was always implicit in the several twists and turns of slavery and indenture; twists and turns which, in themselves and by design, kept their victims in a state of vertigo: social, cultural, economic and, inevitably, political.

The occasion, of course, allows me to do no more than offer a vignette of the common history of bondage that 5 May and 31 July 1838 so uniquely symbolise. And, since my purpose is to highlight how much was common, how much was shared, I shall try to focus my reflections upon one of the many plantations that bear mute witness to the bitter taste of sugar to those who were most central to its production throughout the inglorious era of slavery and indenture: around Plantation Vreed-en-Hoop.

When the 'Hesperus' arrived at the mouth of the Demerara River 150 years and a few hours ago, 70 of the 156 indentured immigrants then on board were bound to Vreed-en-Hoop. Fourteen of these who set out with them from Calcutta did not reach Demerara—the earliest victims of indenture.[2] Forty-three years later (on 4 January 1881), with the system in full flow, another ship—the 'Ellora'—arrived in Demerara with another human cargo. Among them were a young widow and her son of 9 bound also for Vreed-en-Hoop: my great grandmother and her young son.[3]

She would serve out her indenture and, in time, the young Daniel Ramphal would leave the plantations, in fact, leave Demerara for

Bochice, where his son, my father, 'J.I.', would commence his life's work in education—and begin a family of which I would be the first born: in New Amsterdam. Vreed-en-Hoop has for me, therefore, a special relevance; but, as we shall see, its relevance to the genesis of the nation goes far beyond those personal links. Vreed-en-Hoop serves to tell the story of the unifying historical experience of slavery and indenture in a particularly dramatic way. To recall that shared experience I must first go back to the years before 1838, before the beginning of indenture; with Vreed-en-Hoop, however, always as a focal point.

Two and half years ago (in late 1985) I found myself in England's far north as the honoured guest of the ancient University of Durham founded in 1832 just before slavery's abolition. The occasion was a degree ceremony, and Durham's public orator chose Charles Dickens' Mr. Pickwick with a nice appropriateness to illustrate the 'oddity', as he described it, of 'how easily we may leave in obscurity the background to what we take for granted'. He made the point (in the style of public orators) that, while there can be no character in English fiction better known and better loved than Mr. Pickwick, a close reading leads to the awkward conclusion that the accumulation of Mr. Pickwick's fortune has been connected with the slave trade: connected through an acquaintance whose office is in Liverpool, 'that metropolis of the Middle Passage', and whose sugar plantations—slave plantations—are in Demerara.

'The Pickwick Papers', which first appeared in 1836, were set in the England of the 1820s. It was a serialised work which fused a journalistic style with the format of fiction and, like so much of Dickens' writing, was a biting social commentary on contemporary evils. We know that one of the characters in 'The Pickwick Papers', Alfred Jingle, was actually believed in Demerara 150 years ago to be based on the real Dr. Dodson of Plantation Vive La Force.[4] Could Mr. Pickwick's influential friend, his 'Liverpool acquaintenance' with slave plantations in Demerara, have been Sir John Gladstone—Vreed-en-Hoop's owner?

By 1821, John Gladstone was already a Liverpool merchant of substantial means with something like a half of his fortune deriving from slave plantations in Demerara, among them, prominently, Vreed-en-Hoop. It was a proportion that was to rise substantially.[5] Frustrated in his own desire to represent the Corporation of Liverpool in Parliament, John Gladstone was to have two of his sons go to Westminster—and William rise to be one of Britain's great Prime Ministers. William Gladstone came to Westminster in 1832 when the abolition of slavery was an inescapable political issue and one which, as events turned out, he had to face immediately. On 14 May that same year, Lord Howick, a former Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, laid specific complaints in Parliament against the management of John Gladstone's sugar estate at Vreed-en-Hoop: alleging 'that the increase in sugar cultivation was in direct ration with over-working and loss of life on the part of the slave population'.[6] William made the best of a bad job in his father's defence—a vindication of slavery Eric Williams was later to attribute 'more to filial feelings than Liberal principles'.[7] But, for the owner of Vreed-en-Hoop, this was not the first complaint to reach Westminster; nor was it to be the last.

Let me recall the first occasion by way of a personal reminiscence. After reading Law at London, I returned to Georgetown in 1953 as a young Crown Counsel in the Chambers of the Attorney General, Sir Frank Holder. The Attorney General then had supervision of the Magistrates Department and on my first day in the Public Buildings he put me under the wing of Guy Sharples—already a senior Magistrate—to take me on the rounds of the Law Courts to meet the Chief Justice and Judges and, eventually, the Magistrates. He was a man whose aptitudes and interests went well beyond the law, as those of you who remember his landscapes—some of them reproduced in Webber's Centenary History of British Guiana—will appreciate. As we did those rounds, Sharples made the point to me that it was on the site of these present courts that the Rev. John Smith had been detained in 1823 pending a trial condemned by all save the West Indian plantocracy as a tragic parody of justice; a trial which led to his conviction and eventually to his death in prison.[8] There is a place for argument about the overall role of Christian missionaries in the evolution of our nation; but Smith's Church is a permanent memorial to this man of God who saw in the slave only his fellow man. That moment of remembrance has always remained with me; for I have come to realise what I think Guy Sharples understood well and hoped I would realise one day: that recalling the events that brought Smith to his end in the cells of a Demerara prison was not just a leap over centuries but a backward glance along a continuous line.

The decade or so before the Abolition of Slavery Act was pased in 1834 was a particularly turbulent time throughout the West Indies: a slave rebellion had taken place in Barbados in 1816, a revolt in Demerara in 1823, an uprising in Jamaica in 1824, an insurrection in Antigua in 1831 and the much larger Jamaica revolt in Christmas of the year.[9] Eric Williams sums up well the situation that had been reached on the eve of emancipation:

> In 1833, therefore, the alternatives were clear: emancipation from above, or emancipation from below. But EMANCIPATION.

> Economic change, the decline of the monopolists, the development of capitalism, the humanitarian agitation in the British churches, contending perorations in the halls of Parliament, had now reached their completion in the determination of the slaves themselves to be free.[10]

Nowhere in Guiana was that determination more evident than on some of Sir John Gladstone's plantations—estates of the Vreed-en-Hoop stable. The Demerara Revolt of 1823 really sounded the death-knell of slavery in Guiana. It was a mighty thunder clap in the gathering storm of slave rebellion. Its reverberations were felt far beyond Guiana's shores—not least because of the indescribable cruelty with which it was eventually put down.

The story of that Revolt has been told many times and its details are well known to this audience; but some elements bear retelling, especially today. On the evening of 18 August an uprising started on two estates on the East Coast of Demerara: Plantations Le Resouvenir and Success. The Revolt centered on the demand for immediate emancipation, which the slaves genuinely believed the Crown had approved but was being denied them locally—a belief substantially, if not yet technically, true. A contemporary account was set down by the artist, Joshua Bryant, in meticulous, if undifferentiated, detail.[11] Later accounts were given with a pro-planter bias by Rodway and, more sympathetically, by Webber.[12] A version which highlights the manoeuverings at Westminster is in Robin Furneaux's recent work on Wilberforce.[13]

Those varying presentations reflect some of the disparate factors influencing the tortuous course of bondage in Guiana—factors that were to remain at work over the transition from slavery to indenture. The suffering of those crushed down by the system was of course the bed-rock factor. The ruthless efficiency of their oppression held in check the will to rebel; it never induced acquiescence across the board. Sugar was ever a bitter crop for those who toiled at producing it in Guiana's inhospitable conditions. But at least three other groups of actors would influence the outcome: the planters, the imperial government and the humanitarian movement led by men like Wilberforce and Thomas Buxton.

Too often, and certainly for too long; despite the efforts of the Anti-Slavery Movement in Britain and individual voices of conscience at Westminster and in Whitehall—the British Government remained the protectors of the oppressors rather than the oppressed. British economic interests, the claims of kinship, imperial considerations: all stood in the way of the Government at Westminster tipping the scales in favour of justice and freedom. When, occasionally; it did, it was often so half-hearted and reluctant an effort that the planters could continue to oppose, to stall and, sometimes, to prevail. The Demerara Revolt of 1823 was a classic example of this; but there were earlier victories of the planters: more pointed but just as pyrrhic. One of these deserves mention here both because of its intrinsic importance and because it has received inadequate notice in the literature to date.

One of the early successes of the Anti-Slavery Movement was securing the passing of the Slave Trade Abolition Act of 1807 over the fierce objections of the West India lobby and the sugar planters in the West Indies in particular. Emancipation would not come for another thirty years; but at least there was in sight an end to the pernicious trade in slaves. It has been estimated that starting with that Act of 1807, no less than 120,000 slaves were liberated from foreign slave ships between 1810 and 1846.[14] What is not well known is that the approaches to that Abolition Act of 1807 had been skilfully prepared by Wilberforce and his friends and that Guiana played a central role in the overall scheme.

Defeated on a succession of foreign slave trade bills and despairing of progress through parliamentry action, the anti-slavery campaigners in Britain seized on the capture of the Dutch colonies in Guiana in 1803 to secure an executive order—the 'Guiana Order' of 1805, authorised as a war measure—to abolish the slave trade to the captured Guiana colonies. They then deftly devised the Foreign Slave Trade Act of 1806 confirming the 'Guiana Order' and attaching to it all the provisions of previous defeated Foreign Slave Trade Bills.[15] The Slave Trade Abolition Act the following year became undeniable. The planters had been overcome; though, of course, the abolition of the trade did not render slavery itself illegal.

Wilberforce thus moved again on the Guiana front. When Berbice fell to the British in 1803 those sugar estates in the Colony which were the property of the Dutch Government became the property of the British Crown—along with the slaves attached to them.[16] The abolitionists seized the opportunity to put forward a plan for the actual administration of the Berbice estates on the basis of 'such improvements as the Government itself...had recommended to the colonial Assemblies to adopt and enforce upon private masters'; arrangements which 'could not...be safely left to the colonial Government, or to individual agents on the spot, without the intimate superintendence and control of some authority in England'.[17]

That 'authority in England' duly turned out to be Wilberforce and five others all appointed (on 23 April 1811) as Commissioners 'for the management of the Crown's estates in Berbice' and 'for the preservation, protection and improvement of the negro and other slaves belonging thereto'.[18] The Berbice estates were some of the worst anywhere—as my fellow Berbician, Edgar Mittleholzer so well dramatised in his Kaywana trilogy.[19] Among them was Dageraad—a name that has now passed into the history of Guyana and of slavery generally as a symbol of the bestiality of the system and the courage of its victims in resisting it.[20]

The attitude of the planters to Wilberforce's Bebice Commission was open hostility; even the Governor was opposed, urging the Crown to lease or sell the estates 'on almost any terms'.[21] Wilberforce's zeal to demonstrate the practicality of a more humanitarian approach was in sharp contrast. The first instructions of the Commissioners for improvements on the Berbice estates ran to seven closely printed pages. Typical of them was the direction that 'the cart-whip in the hands of the driver, as an instrument of compelling labour, should be laid aside'.[22] But the Anti-Slavery Movement had come too close to home for the liking of both the planters and the local administration. They struck out vigorously against Wilberforce and his Commissioners, and a campaign for the withdrawal of the Commission was conducted at high levels of influence. This time, the planters won.[23]

Withdrawal of the Commission was, of course, not politically feasible. Instead, by the 'Convention between Great Britain and the Netherlands relative to the Colonies of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice' in 1815, the British Government agreed that the estates in Berbice would revert to their former owners—now identified, however, not as the Dutch Government but as the 'Berbice Association':[24] the proprietors whose monogram appears on the cover of Rodway's History of British Guiana. Wilberforce and his colleagues were aghast and pleaded against retrogression. Their principal agent wrote from Berbice in outraged distress: 'Methinks I hear the whip sounding again without mercy'.[25]

But it was all to no avail; reform by example was not to be; the planters could not be fought in the lands where slavery flourished. Only emancipation would suffice; and for that the Anti-Slavery Movement had to struggle in London. The failure of the Berbice Commission demonstrated the Neanderthal myopia of the planters, the immense strength of the West India lobby, and the malleability of the British Government; and it demonstrated as well the differing perceptions of those disparate factors that I talked about earlier.

On 15 May 1823, Thomas Buxton moved the following motion in the House of Commons:

> That the state of slavery is repugnant to the British Constitution and to the Christian religion, and that it ought to be abolished gradually

> throughout the British colonies with as much expedition as may be found consistent with a due regard to the well-being of the parties concerned.[26]

The Government's response was amelioration not abolition; but, through a series of resolutions, it directed that these reforms (like an end to the flogging of female slaves and the carrying of the whip into the field) be put into effect.[27] The planters and the Court of Policy procrastinated and prevaricated. The slaves knew change was at hand and sensed that the planters were resisting what were their rights. They felt they had to strengthen the hand of the Governor against the planters. They were only half right, but they moved, naively, to compel 'without bloodshed' but by a show of force the freedom which they believed the King had decreed to be theirs. The Revolt was crushed with frenzied brutality and followed by savage vengeance. Thirteen thousand slaves from 37 plantations had joined the rebels; it was a colossal show of strength; but they were badly armed and easily subdued.

The clemency and overall restraint they showed while briefly in charge of the plantations was not reciprocated. Quamina, their leader, was killed in the revolt. Nearly 50 were hanged, three given the dreadful sentence of 1,000 lashes and condemned to be worked in chains, two for the remainder of their lives. Quamina's son, Jack, was among those hanged; his head, like those of the others executed, was stuck on a pole for public viewing: in the words of the local Gazette, as 'a monument of personal guilt' and 'a caution against like criminality'.[28]

The Rev. John Smith was convicted by court martial of complicity in the Revolt. He was sentenced to death and died in the Georgetown Prison awaiting the outcome of a petition for clemency which the Governor had cautiously referred to the authorities in London.[29] The planters believed they had won again; but, had they? It was from the Gladstone estate of Success that the revolt had been initiated—on the middle walk dam on Sunday 17 August 1823. Quamina was from Success, and it was there that his son, Jack, was also enslaved: a son who bore not his father's name but that of his master Gladstone. It was on the adjoining estate of Le Resouvenir that the Rev. John Smith had his Bethel Chapel, of which Quamina was one of the leaders.[30] Jack Gladstone epitomised the reality of slavery; his execution was a symbol of the evil that sustained it but in the halls of Westminster it was John Smith's 'martyrdom' that most spurred the anti-slavery cause. Despite the initial victory of the planters, the Demerara Revolt, in all its implications, dealt slavery a blow from which it never recovered.

But that, of course, was not how Vreed-en-Hoop's owner would have seen those events, Wilberforce pamphlets calling for emancipation had been circulating on the estates. The local Gazette did not conceal the planters' wrath:

> Perhaps the intriguing saints at home had a hand in it—if so, they will hear with disappointment and pain that a superintending and just providence has frustrated their diabolical intentions.[31]

The abolitionist cause was diabolical; the vengeance or the slaves was part of the interposition of a superintending and just providence: how cosy an inversion of right and wrong! Slavery was at its height when, in 1758, Voltaire wrote 'Candide': his satirical commentary on a philosophy of complacency and acquiescence—the supremacy of hypocrisy over truth, the pretence that however evil and abhorrent the state of individual things, 'this world of ours is the best of all possible worlds'.[32] Its relevance for us could hardly be more pointed.

In one unforgetable incident, Voltaire pictured the innocent Candide entering Surinam and encountering a negro slave lying on the ground. The slave, who has lost both a hand and a leg, tells Candide that this is 'the price paid for the sugar you eat in Europe'. 'Oh Pangloss!', cries Candide, 'This is an abomination you had not guessed; this is too much. In the end I shall have to renounce optimism'. 'What is this optimism', asks Candide's footman. 'Alas', says Candide, 'it is the mania of maintaining that all is good when all is bad'. And Candide weeps as he enters Surinam.[33] By 1838, as the 'Hesperus' entered Demerara, some things had changed; but not such basis attitudes as the supremacy of hypocrisy over truth, the mania of maintaining that all was good when all was bad.

Clinging to illusion as a prop for the status quo, emanicipation to the planters was just an interlude in the story of sugar; an imposition they fiercely resented, but one which they had to overcome and continue in business. First, however, they would collect what was on offer: twenty million pounds sterling in compensation for emancipation—the equivalent today of close to one billion (US) dollars. The Guiana planters' share of this was £4,924,989 (nearly £5 million) for 82,824 slaves.[34] That was almost a quarter of the total compensation paid by the British Government on the abolition of slavery. Vreed-en-Hoop's owner John Gladstone, alone received almost £85,000.[35] The handwritten calculation of his father's Guiana slave compensation by England's future Prime Minister, William Gladstone, (in 1835) is a document that conjures up images of that time 150 years ago even more evocative than the sums it records.[36] But, as Alan Adamson says in 'Sugar Without Slaves': 'It occurred to no one to compensate the slaves for their previous bondage.'[37] Of course it occurred to no one. Remember Candide and 'the mania of maintaining that all is good when all is bad'. In the 1832 debate in the House of Commons on the management of Vreed-en-Hoop, William Gladstone, was recorded in Hansard as follows:

> He deprecated cruelty—he deprecated slavery: it was abhorrent to the nature of Englishmen; but conceding all these things, were not Englishmen to retain a right to their own honestly and legally acquired property?[38]

So, on slavery's abolition, John Gladstone got £85,000; while his slaves got apprenticeship.

In Guiana, the apprenticeship code appears to have been the harshest of all, but that deferral of freedom was to last only four of the six appointed years.[39] Meanwhile, John Gladstone did not loiter. Supply and demand should have dictated a new economics of the sugar industry—increased wages for the freed slaves who chose to remain on the sugar plantations. But that would have meant higher costs, lower profits perhaps, closure. Instead, the planters pocketed the compensation for their unpaid slave capital and set out to invent 'a new system of slavery'[40]—with Vreed-en-Hoop's John Gladstone leading the effort. In the beginning, it was not so much a strategy of replacing the entire labour force as a tactic of reducing the bargaining power of the freed slaves by having a reserve labour pool 'to use as a set-off'[41] and the promise of enlargement if need be.

The English expatriate firm of Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co. worked from Calcutta. One of its members, F.M. Gillanders, was a cousin of John Gladstone's wife.[42] They had already supplied Indian labour to the sugar plantations of Mauritius. Through the family connection they offered their services to do likewise for Gladstone's Guiana estates at a cost of 'not one-half that of a slave'.[43] John Gladstone jumped at the offer; there might be problems in London where anti-slavery sentiment was still strong; but he had by now powerful political friends. There might be problems in India; but it was not lost on him that another Guiana proprietor, Andrew Colville—who owned Bell Vue estate—was a 'near relative' of Lord Auckland, India's Governor General.[44] He was to involve Colville in the enterprise.

I have now seen the full texts of that early correspondence between Sir John Gladstone and the Calcutta firm. They are every bit as bad as the contemporary account by John Scoble of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society suggested in his pamphlet on 'The Deplorable Condition of Hill Coolies in British Guiana and Mauritius' published in 1840.

Let me interpose here a personal reflection encouraged by those letters to remind us of the way history permeates our lives, guiding destinies in mysterious and unseen ways, revealing the past through unseen links to the present. All of us in our lives have been touched thus by the course of history. All of us are what we are because of its turnings centuries ago; we are here because those pathways brought us here. The correspondence to which I have just reffered shows that John Gladstone's letter to the Secretary of State forwarding his correspondence with Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co. was written in 1838 from Carlton Gardens, London. In June 1833, John Gladstone, abandoning his nomadic existence, though not yet his sugar interests in Demerara, bought as his London residence Number 6 Carlton Gardens—the address from which so much of those early negotiations, crucial to Guiana's future, was conducted. One hundred and forty-two years later to the month, in July 1975, I took up my appointment at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London and moved into the Secretary-General's residence—at 5 Carlton Gardens. Numbers 5 and 6 Carlton Gardens by then were in fact one, both incorporated into Wool House—sugar was no longer 'king'.[47]

How full a circle the wheel of history thus described! John Gladstone's letter of 1836 had started a system that would eventually bring my ancestors from India to Guyana—to the same estate of Vreed-en-Hoop he once owned. Three generations later, those very events would combine with others to take me to London in the service of a Commonwealth of which Gladstone could never have dreamt—to dwell at the address in London he had chosen for his own retirement. The moving finger of history, having written, does move on. But conjunctures of this kind help to remind us that every piece of history our actions inscribe today helps to determine the nature of tomorrow's entry and, in so doing, to bind the present to the future and the future to the past.

But let me return to those letters. What they show with starkness is that continuum of which I spoke earlier, the continuance beyond emancipation of that state of mind Candide had encountered in Surinam which accepted massive human suffering as a valid low-cost factor in the price of sugar. But it is, perhaps, the letter from Calcutta (6 June 1836) in response to John Gladstone's enquiry that most clearly reveals the underlying perception of 'otherness' which linked slavery and indenture and gave human bondage under both systems a common root:

> We are not aware that any greater difficulty would present itself in sending men to the West Indies (than to Mauritius), the natives being perfectly ignorant of the place they go to or the length of voyage

> they are undertaking...The Dhangurs are always spoken of as more akin to the monkey than the man. They have no religion, no education, and in their present state no want beyond eating, drinking and sleeping: and to procure which they are willing to labour.[48]

Note what Tinker described as the 'curiously proto-Darwinian tone'; the same dehumanisation that had sustained slavery to the extent that the Anti-Slavery Movement had made a credo of the question: 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?' Once dehumanise the victim and any inhumanity becomes possible. In the accountancy of an Eichmann the Jews sent to Nazi gas chambers were not 'people' but 'pieces'. Apartheid's victims are much the same today in the eyes of the system. Indentured labourers, like slaves, were mere factors of production in the crudest sense. Indenture's chains were of paper; but the mental condition which managed to justify bondage under each system was the same; and race was at the heart of both.

The original Gladstone letter was written on 4 January 1836; the reply from Gillanders, Arbuthnot, & Co. in Calcutta on 6 June that same year. The correspondence that followed in 1837 was to do essentially with the details of that initial voyage of the 'Hesperus' and the 'Whitby'. The 'Hesperus' belonged to Gladstone's firm—'John Gladstone and Co.' It was a three-masted barque, square rigged on the first and second masts and gaff rigged on the last. It was a mere 329 registered tons.[49] It was the 'Hesperus' that brought the Gladstone labourers, most of them bound for Vreed-en-Hoop—the first real movement of people from the East Indies to the Western Hemisphere and, in particular, to the West Indies that Columbus had misnamed in 1492 convincing himself that he had reached Asia from the West. That was why he called the first people of the Caribbean—'Indians'. But, between the voyages of the 'Santa Maria' and the 'Hesperus' were to pass nearly 350 years.

However, there was more for Gladstone to do than merely arrange the transportation of these first immigrants from India to the 'New World'. By 1836, the planters were getting distinctly anxious about the situation that would arise after the apprenticeship system ended and slave labour was finally withdrawn from the plantations. In a letter of 23 February 1837, which he wrote (from Carlton Gardens) to Sir John Hobhouse, then President of the Board of Control (a copy of which he subsequently sent to Lord Glenelg, then Secretary of State for the Colonies), Gladstone set out the situation and the thinking of the planters with a frankness normally reserved for private correspondence.

> A considerable Degree of Uncertainty prevails in all our West India

> Colonies whether the Apprentices, when the Period of their Services expires, on the 1st August 1840, will be disposed to hire themselves to work on reasonable Terms, and on a System of Continuance such as will ensure the regular Cultivation and Manufacture of the Produce, which it is considered can only be ascertained when that Period arrives. It is also thought that by obtaining the Services of other Classes of Labourers in the Interval, and for a Period beyond the Termination of the Apprenticeship, it may materially influence the Conduct of the Apprentices, and induce them more readily to meet the Wishes of their Employers; with this View Labourers have been sent from Germany, Madeira, Ireland, and elsewhere, but these Experiments have not succeeded, from the Influence of the Climate generally producing reluctance to labour, and increasing the Desire for Spirituous Liquors, which the low Price and Abundance of new Rum enables them to gratify.[50]

That letter represented the beginning of the other half of Gladstone's preparation for the voyage of the 'Hesperus' and the 'Whitby'. He needed an assurance from the British Government whether an Order in Council or any other authorisation was necessary for the purpose of 'carrying this experimental measure into execution, in order to secure us against interfering or prevention by the authorities at Calcutta'. He had good reason to seek that assurance.

Already, on 27 June 1836, the Court of Policy had passed "an Ordinance for the Better Regulation and Enforcement of the Relevant Duties of Masters and Employers, and Articled Servants and Tradesmen in British Guiana". It had been transmitted by the Governor, Sir James Carmichael Smyth, to the Secretary of State with a statement that he had 'very little Doubt but that the several Enactments of this Ordinance (prepared as they are in the Spirit of Perfect Equality and Reciprocity in compelling the Performance of the Engagements by which the Parties in question may severally be bound) will meet with His Majesty's most gracious Approbation'.[51] Again that same perception that all was good when all was bad. Such approbation was not forthcoming. Under pressure of the Anti-Slavery Movement, the political situation in Britain had become highly sensitised and the British Government was obliged to proceed with caution. In his reply to the Governor, of 31 October 1836, it fell to the Secretary of State, no less, to draw the Governor's attention to the reality that this legislation—which was to be the underpinning for the indenture system—really was ushering in a new system of slavery:

> The general Effect of this Ordinance (wrote Lord Glenelg) may, with

> little Inaccuracy, be said to be to continue, in respect of all Persons who shall enter into Indentures of Apprenticeship, the existing Relations between the Employer and the apprenticed Labourer, although without the Intervention of a special Magistracy. The most material Exception is, that the Apprenticeship to be constituted under this Ordinance would not render the Apprentice liable to personal Chastisement in case of Misconduct.[52]

At least initially, that latter exception was to prove hollow—especially at Vreed-en-Hoop. In any event, this 'Indenture Law' was allowed to stand with a reduction in the period of indenture from seven years to three and the exclusion of any person recruited 'on the Continent of Africa or in any of the adjacent islands inhabited wholly or in part by the Negro race'.[53] So obvious was it to the authorities in London that what was about to begin was a new system of slavery that Africans simply had to be excluded from it if the Government was to have any chance of remitting what Lord Glenelg described to Governor Carmichael Smyth (31st October 1836) as 'a plausible, if not a just, Reproach against this Country of Insincerity in our Professions on that Subject' (of slavery).[54] The system of bondage would continue; but with different bondsmen.

Yet even this did not suffice for the requirements of Vreed-en-Hoop and the plantocracy in general. John Gladstone returned to the charge arguing forcefully, in a letter to Sir Geo Grey of 23 March 1837, that:

> it is only by a Supply being obtained of other free Labourers, to such an Extent as may incite Competition and induce our present Apprentices to believe that it may become practicable to carry forward the Cultivation on a moderate Scale independent of their Aid, that they are likely to be influenced for such Terms of Remuneration as the Planters may be enabled to give them. ...We therefore (he concluded) would require Powers to enter into an extended rather than a shorter Period of Service, nor could we entertain a Hope of Remuneration, or to overcome the apprehended Difficulties, if the Hiring was restricted to a shorter Period than Five Years.[55]

Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co. had told Gladstone that they could supply Indian labourers at a cost 'less than half that of a slave'. Nearly a year later (29 April 1837), Gladstone was representing the very opposite to the Secretary of State, namely, his certainly:

> that the Labour of our present People has not cost us One Half of what we should have to pay for the Services of the Hill Collies.[56]

He was inverting the cost factor to sustain the argument that a longer period of indenture was required to secure a reasonable return on the investment in indenture. The lives of our forefathers were being measured as in a counting house. But the Secretary of State yielded. On 19 August 1837, he instructed Governor Carmichael Smyth that as a result of the arguments produced:

> Her Majesty's Government have agreed to Mr. Gladstone's proposal that the Term of Apprenticeship of Natives of any place within the Charter of the East India Company imported as Labourers into Guiana should be extended to Five Years.[57]

On 20th May 1837, Gladstone was able to write to his Calcutta recruiters:

> I have now made the necessary Arrangements with the Colonial Department, and an Order in Council corresponding with them will be immediately published.[58]

He forthwith increased the order for Coolies from 150 to 200, and added a reminder in the numerate tradition of the merchandise trade:

> One-third for the Messrs. Moss, Two-Thirds for me, to prevent any difficulty when they arrive at Demerara (20th May 1837).[59]

An Order in Council of 12 July 1837 duly gave effect to this further amendment of the Guyana 'Indenture Law'; but the Order in Council was not published and did not come to light until 3 January 1838 when it was denounced in the 'British Emancipator' (the official organ of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society) as 'giving birth to a new slave-trade'.[60] John Scoble of the Society, who was later to visit Guiana and write his celebrated exposure of 'The Deplorable Conditions of the Hill Coolies', and of 'the Nefarious Means by which they were Induced to Resort to British Guiana and Mauritius' was later to claim that this Order in Council:

> gave a carte blanche to every villain in British Guiana, and every scoundrel in India to kidnap and inveigle into contracts for labour for five years, in a distant part of the world, the ignorant and inoffensive Hindoo![61]

On the fly-leaf to that pamphlet Scoble quoted from the newspaper 'The Friend of India', published in Calcutta, of 3 August 1839:

> Under the colour of a Bill for protecting the Indian labourers, it is proposed to legalize the importation of them into the colonies. ...It was in this manner that the Slave-trade crept in, under the shadow of Parliamentary regulation; a race was then begun between abuses and legislation, in which legislation was always found to be in the rear. AND SO IT WILL BE WITH THE COOLEY TRADE. We must tread the same circle; and, after years of the most poignant misery, come to the same result, that in the case of the new, as of the old, trade, THE ONLY PATH OF SAFETY LIES IN ABSOLUTE PROHIBITION.

We were indeed to tread the same circle; but absolute prohibition was not to come for some eighty years.

Let there be no doubt whatsoever in our minds as we begin this Commemoration that what we are marking are stages in a continuous process of bondage which began with the induction of the first African slaves into the Guiana colonies and ended with the prohibition of indenture in 1917. It was one experience with differing shades of brutality, differing methods of coercion, but a common experience of human bondage. The condition of slavery in the days, for example, of the 1763 Rebellion at Magdalenenberg were very different from that of indenture in the end years of the system. As Dr. Basdeo Mangru had reminded us in 'Benevolent Neutrality', the fact that the slave was private property and that slavery implied permanence were basic differences—however much they tended to be overshadowed by the similarities.[62] Yet, at the moment of transition 150 years ago, apprenticeship so shaded into indenture that Brougham could speak in the House of Commons of 'indentured apprenticeship'[63] when referring to slavery between 1834 and 1838 and Lord John Russell could himself describe (and reject) indenture in 1840 as 'a new system of slavery'.[64] Apprenticeship was indenture; indenture was slavery; in an important sense, they were all one.

But the truest testimony to the bondage in continuum that May and July 1838 marked was not that given by words in the British Parliament but the experience of those who were to labour on the sugar plantations. Like the slaves before them, Indian indentured labourers had first to endure their own passage across the *Kala Pani*—The Black Waters—their own diaspora, not so unlike that earliest pernicious traffic in human cargo. Arthur Seymour has described the Middle Passage in these terms:

> A ferry of infamy from the heart of Africa Roots torn and bleeding
> from their native soil
> A stain of race spreading across the ocean.[66]

And so, indeed, it was. It remains an apt description of the ferry that was to succeed it, beginning with the 'Hesperus' and the 'Whitby', crossing from the heart of India, spreading another stain of race across the ocean.

And the identity of experience continued beyond the journey into the labouring—an experience in its totality well described by Hugh Tinker as an 'exile into bondage'.[67] Perhaps the truest symbol of the unbroken chain between slavery and indenture was the tenement range or 'logie' of the inherited 'nigger yard': the squalid, foul, degenerate, huddled pens that passed for housing for slave and indentured labourer alike. 'Nigger Yard', 'coolie yard', 'bound yard' were all one, only the labels changed to match the changing style of servitude.[68] Like the slave, the Indian immigrant was subject to the coercion of the whip and to the new coercion of criminal law applied for labour offences such as absenteeism and lack of identity documents which were not crimes under the general law. No wonder the Royal Commission in 1870 described the indentured Indian as trapped by the law, 'in the hands of a system which elaborately twists and turns him about, but always leaves him face to face with an impossibility'.[70]

In his Foreword to Walter Rodney's 'A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905'—a history whose central thesis was that shared common experience between indenture and slavery—George Lamming sums up the cruel realities of indenture thus:

> "Indentured labour was bound labour. It was deprived of all mobility and was therefore condemned to provide that reliability of service a crop like sugar demanded. The planter class, with the full permission of the metropolitan power, had given itself the legal right to deploy this labour as it pleased. As Rodney emphasises, here, with great relevance to many a contemporary situation, what the ruling class could not acquire by the normal play of the market forces had now been appropriated through legal sanctions. Indentured Indian labour was enslaved by the tyranny of the law that decided their relations to the land where they walked, and worked and slept.[71]

Rodney himself emphasised the link with characteristic penetration:

> ...indentured labour had its ultimate function the guaranteeing of planter control over the entire labour process... this alone justified the continuation of indentureship, irrespective of the cost to the individual proprietor and to the general taxpayer... More than anything else, it was the regimented social and industrial control which caused indenture to approximate so closely to slavery.[72]

In his original letter to Gillanders, Arbuthnot & Co. of 4 January 1836, John Gladstone had painted a picture of life on Vreed-en-Hoop (or any of his other estates) which was not merely an embellishment of reality but a total travesty of truth:

> Our Plantation Labour in the Field is very light; much of it, particularly in Demerara, is done by Task Work, which for the Day is usually completed by Two o'clock in the Afternoon, giving to the People all the rest of the Day to themselves. They are furnished with comfortable Dwellings and an Abundance of Food; ...They have likewise and annual Allowance of Clothing sufficient and suitable for the Climate; there are Schools on each Estate for Education of the Children, and the instruction of their Parents in the Knowledge of their Religious Duties. Their Houses are comfortable and it may be fairly said they pass their Time agreeably and happily.[73]

He was describing slave labour and promising those same idyllic conditions to those who took the place of the slaves. The same conditions did prevail for the newcomers; but they were hardly idyllic. Indenture, like slavery, was rooted in massive self-induced illusion of the kind Candide encountered in Surinam: 'the mania of believing that all is good when all is bad'.

Only a few years later, John Scoble was to reveal the conditions at Vreed-en-Hoop which the passengers of the 'Hesperus' actually encountered. Complaints had been made to the Governor that they were being ill-treated and an enquiry resulted. Scoble was by then in Guiana and imposed himself on the proceedings. The result was a devastating indictment of conditions at Vreed-en-Hoop. Flogging and confinement were proved beyond all dispute. Two of the women who gave evidence (both presumably freed slaves) spoke in these terms:

> According to Rose:
> They appeared to me as severely punished as my matties were, during the apprenticeship; when flogged, they were flogged with a cat, the same as was formerly in use; they brought all from the sick-house together, and took them to the negro-yard to be flogged; they were tied to a post.
> Elizabeth Caesar said:
> The Coolies were locked up in the sick-house, and next morning they were flogged with a cat-o'-nine-tails; the manager was in the house, and they flogged the people under his house; they were tied to the post of the gallery of the manager's house; I cannot tell how many licks; he gave them enough. I saw blood. When they were

flogged at manager's house, they rubbed salt pickle on their backs.[74]

The report of that enquiry was dated 2 May 1839. By the 3 August, Gladstone was writing to the Marquis of Normandy that:

> The people continued cheerful and contended; but evil disposed persons have recently gone among them, and have endeavoured to create a bad and dissatisfied feeling, in which they have partially succeeded, as is at present too generally the case in England, where similar effects are produced by the Chartists and others, among the lower classes.[75]

The truth is it needed no 'evil disposed persons' to persuade those trapped by the 'Gladstone experiment' to flee its horrors. Perhaps the most pathetic story of all is that of the twenty indentured labourers landed by the 'Whitby' who, trying to escape from Plantation Highbury in April/May 1839, 'cut their way, due east, reaching Bengal';[76] plaintive resonances of that first Gillanders letter: 'the Natives being perfectly ignorant of the Place they agree to go, or the length of the voyage they are undertaking'.

Not much had changed in the Vreed-en-Hoop stable from the days of Jack Gladstone and the 1823 revolt. By now, however,l its squalid realities were becoming a problem for its owners' son—the future Prime Minister of England. John Gladstone sold up: Vreed-en-Hoop went in July 1840 for £53,000. 'The Coolies', he remarked 'are excellent bait for effecting the sales':[77] 'pieces', not 'people'. With the proceeds, Gladstone set up a trust for his children, including William: Demerara contributing to the future Prime Minister's financial independence, though he protested at the same time that 'this increased wealth so much beyond my needs with its attendant responsibility is very burdensome, however on his part the act be beautiful'.[78] The meaning of Vreed-en-Hoop is 'Peace and Hope'. One hundred and fifty years ago it helped to bring both to the Gladstone family; but neither to the children of slavery and indenture.

On the final division of Gladstone's estate in 1848, the house in Carlton Gardens went to William.[79] John Gladstone had never lived in Guyana; but the sale of Vreed-en-Hoop, and later success, was, in a sense, his act of retirement from Demerara and the West Indies. He left behind, however, the legacy of indenture which he had begun with the 'Hesperus' in 1838, and which resumed in 1845 despite the earlier protestations of Lord John Russell. For 80 years after that first arrival, indenture would tread the same circle towards prohibition as slavery had done before emancipation.

In 1929, the Rev. C.F. Andrews—Gandhi's trusted friend—visited Guyana and my parent's humble home in New Amsterdam. My father had managed the Berbice end of his visit to Guyana and he in turn was interested in 'J.I.'s efforts for the education of Indian girls; efforts that were to contribute to the withdrawal 4 years later of the Swettanham Circular which since 1904 had retarded the education of the daughters of indenture. That evening in New Amsterdam I was still a tearful infant not yet a year old. It is now part of family lore that the old priest took me in his arms, quieted the crying and gave me his blessing.[80] My mother, at least, had hope for me thereafter. The next year, C.F. Andrews, at the end of a sentimental visit to Fiji, placed his faith in the 'powers of recovery' of the indentured Indians.[81] That power of recovery—what I have earlier in this Lecture called 'the process of renewal'—was a power and a quality which the children of Indian indenture shared with their brothers and sisters of African descent who are the children of slavery in its cruellest form. When Martin Carter proclaimed:

> From the nigger-yard of yesterday I come with my burden
> To the world of tomorrow I turn with my strength.[82]

He spoke for all who were the victims of both slavery and indenture; he spoke of all who shared in Guyana the common experience of bondage and, out of bondage, in the genesis of the nation. And he spoke with truth of hope well justified. How the children of slavery and indenture would use their powers of recovery however, what pathways the process of renewal would follow, would depend in large measure on whether slavery and indenture were indeed perceived as the unifying experience that it was. This process of renewal was crucial to Guyana's future; it, too, was part of the genesis of the nation.

But something else needs to be acknowledged. Indenture could not have thrived if the many who came had not first felt the need to leave. When everything is said about the deceit and coercion and sometimes outright kidnapping of indentured immigrants, there remains the uncomfortable reality that the great majority who crossed the *Kala Pani* did so because of a desperate urge to escape from destitution and despair. Crushed down by poverty, by landlessness and landlordism and, for some at least, by the hopelessness of the caste system, they were in fright from bondage. What the fraudulence and iniquity of indenture did was to lure them from one trap into another; they exchanged a familiar servitude at the base of the Indian economic and social system for the even more alienated inequality of plantation serfdom. Their escape from bondage would turn out to be exile into bondage of another kind.[83]

Yet it was not a meaningless exchange. Although the shackles of the plantation system were not easily cast off, and despite the exploitative and lifeless character of indenture, there was always the prospect of eventual release and renewal: a prospect not vouchsafed them in the ancestral home of 19th century India—as some who returned discovered. Certainly, for the generation that would follow, after the ignominy of indenture would come opportunity. There are many lessons here; among them the sobering one that the arrival of the 'Hesperus' and the 'Whitby' are worthy of commemoration for the additional reason that, in a paradoxical way, that arrival, along with slavery's abolition, was the begining of recovery in a more ultimate sense—the sense in which together they marked the genesis of the nation.

You and I, my generation and the one that followed, are heirs to a formidable tradition of individual effort for recovery. That effort gathered momentum in the end years of the nineteenth century and reached a high point in the 1920s and 1930s as the capacity of the children of slavery and indenture for self-improvement enlarged directly through education—education which they rightly prized almost above all else. In the families of each of us is that record of striving upwards, of working assiduously, often quite modestly, but always steadily towards the goal of self-improvement—a generation for whom the work ethic became an almost natural element of the process of survival.

We have a lot to retrieve from those years, and from the traditions of our parents' generation. When I went to London in 1947 to study Law, my father went with me. He was fulfilling his own life-long ambition to be a lawyer and had already done most of the first part of the Bar exams in Guiana. In the six months it took me to settle down and tackle one subject at the Bar, he had passed his finals. I was 19; he was 44. He hardly practised law, and I would guess that he was a better teacher than he would ever have been a practising lawyer; but he had fulfilled that driving urge for further education—for betterment, fulfilment of potential. And that was typical of his generation. Can we use this Commemoration to recapture some of that enthusiasm for learning? Unless I am much mistaken, we are in danger of going in another direction—making a culture of the pork-knocker's materialist dream. Yet El Dorado always was a city of the mind.

And there are other victories for human fulfilment still to be won in Guyana, as in many countries. In the last decade in particular, international economic conditions have been cruelly harsh for developing countries and have taken a heavy toll of vulnerable economies like ours. But we must admit also that mistakes have been made. The richness of our natural resources, good levels of education and the resourcefulness of our people should have provided greater resilience. Venturing out boldly in a largely unchartered waters and remembering the exploitation and repression that was so much a part of our history, we had to be pioneering and, therefore, to risk making mistakes. But we would be bad pioneers if we fail to admit to such mistakes, and to learn from them—as others are doing throughout the world, including major nations like the Soviet Union and China. To fail to do so is to fall far behind, and it will be little comfort then to applaud our consistency if it be consistency in error.

But the need not to fall behind is even more pointed in the context of this Commemoration; because the challenge that faces developing countries, Guyana included, is not merely the challenge of economic development, but the fact, that in failure lies the danger of returning to a new dependency—a new kind of colonialism—deriving from economic weakness: a return along the path from whence we have come. We cannot afford such retrogression; and circumstances surely are now propitious for renewal and a real leap forward. The vision we have of a prosperous Guyana is not an empty one. It is attainable with sustained effort at economic and political reform; with continuing endeavour to liberalise the environment so that Guyanese can give of their best; with positive action to remove insecurity and fear on the part of all sections of our society. But leadership and good direction are not enough. Much must be contributed by the people of Guyana in a great movement of change and reconstruction.

Relevant to that process of rebuilding, is cardinal lesson from the events of 150 years ago: the lesson that a special obligation devolves on us as the children of slavery and indenture and colonialism. It is the obligation to ensure that no trace of servitude lingers or re-emerges in our society under whatever guise. The legacy of bondage is a continuing one; one which only a vigilant society can eradicate. Wherever racism, oppression, intolerance, authoritarianism, dominion of whatever kind, encroaches on human freedom it stalks in the shadow of slavery and indenture. We must never allow ourselves the complacency of believing that their shadows have been lifted for all time from our country or our region; we must be vigorous in ensuring that they never fall again upon us from any quarter.

In truth, slavery and indenture have left Guiana a legacy of challenge. Almost everything about them—about the systems themselves and about the linkages between them—emphasised difference and prompted division. How else but with resentment could newly freed African slaves react to immigrants arriving to deny them the right to the economic betterment which should have been the very fruit of freedom? Yet, how were the new arrivals to escape the fate of being pawns in a game of life and death they endured but scarcely understood? 'You make human beings the subject of your commerce, as if they were merchandise, and you refuse them the benefit of the great law which governs all commercial dealings—that the supply must ever adapt itself to the demand': thus Brougham (quoting Pitt) inveighed in vain at the very start of Indian indenture to Guiana.[84] Slavery, apprenticeship, indenture were ingredients of a poisoned brew which left a toxic residue of race. From that cup, we must decline to sip; for to do so would be to stage the final act in a tragedy of others' making played out by ourselves. Far better, to create a propitious denouement of our own: one that denies a victory to 'otherness' and makes our national motto of 'one people' reflect not just a pious hope but a present living reality.

If this Commemoration—now and in July—is to fulfil its highest purposes, it must help us to rise to the real challenge that events 150 years ago have bequeathed to us: the challenge truly to make those events the genesis of a nation. We will be able to do so only when we understand truly that slavery and indenture were a continuum, that their victims shared a common experience of bondage, that the same history which tempts us to mutual alienation created a primordial kinship—a heritage of oneness we have been prone to squander but need ceaselessly to cherish and enlarge. Beyond genesis, that surely must be the final revelation.

Doctors and Patients in the Hindu Tradition

Sudhir Kakar

In Indian tradition, men of medicine have rarely been flatteringly or, as the doctors have claimed, even accurately portrayed.* Over the centuries, they have existed as a distinct craft group, viewing themselves as trained and disciplined professionals dedicated to the cause of maintaining health and thus indispensable for man's realisation of at least three of the four goals of human life: religious merit (*dharma*), material gain (*artha*) and personal pleasure (*kama*). The surrounding society, however, has been ambivalent about the doctor's social status and suspicious about what it perceives to be the gulf that exists between his professions and his practice. The ancient priestly law-givers, for instance, regarded the doctor as ritually unclean—since he comes in contact with blood—and proclaimed with ill concealed contempt that a brahman who practices medicine is no better than one who becomes a professional actor or a teacher of dancing, The literati, on the other hand, derided the chasm between the doctor's noble values and his less than noble conduct which to them seemed to be motivated solely by greed and avarice. The following passage from an eleventh-century text is fairly typical of such early literary condemnation: "She was murdered by a rascally doctor, whose infallible science is ever at the service of death; by a wretch who ogles the strong-boxes of his fairer patients, and though he is very old in years and crime, plays the young man for them."

On the other hand, the *vaids*, the practitioners of the traditional Ayurvedic system of medicine, have had their own problems with the building blocks of the Hindu traditions—the metaphysical cluster of ideas and the theory of literature i.e. the moksha-dharma-karma complex. The meeting of medicine and metaphysics in the Ayurvedic texts can only be described as "correct" though sometimes formal and strained because of unvoiced reservations—on both sides. As Debiprasad

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*Paper presented at the International Seminar, Tradition: A Continual Renewal.

Chattopadhyaya in his scholarly study of the *Caraka Samhita* points out, the sometimes confusing and peculiar appearance of the extant text of the *Samhita* derives from the fact that the metaphysical and religious views introduced into it— including those of karma and *adrishta* (unseen causes)—are on the whole loosely superimposed on its genuinely scientific content.[3] The doctors certainly display attitudes that often seem placatory toward conventional Hindu piety though these attitudes have little impact on the theories they need for their practice. Good health, the goal of their profession, they write, is the only means to fulfill the scripturally posited four "ends" (*purushartha*) of life, namely, virtue (*dharma*); material goods (*artha*); sensual pleasure (*kama*); self-realization (*moksha*).[4] Therefore, Ayurveda is the most sacred of all the Vedas since it does good to mankind not only in respect of the life beyond but also in the present life.

Yet the enthusiasm for virtue (dharma) and liberation/self-realization (moksha) seems muted in contrast with the exuberant affirmation of this- worldly ends of gathering wealth and the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. For instance, in the chapter on the three basic desires of life we read, "A person of normal mental faculty, intelligence and energy, desirous of this well-being pertaining to this world and the world beyond has to seek three basic desires, viz., desire to live, desire to earn and desire to perform virtuous acts,"[6] After the commentator has assured us that sensuality has been omitted only because "the desire to satisfy passion constitutes the natural instinct of mankind and as such it is too axiomatic to be discussed,"[7] the text goes on to assert that "out of all these desires, one should give priority to the desire for longevity." Why? Because "with the end of life there is the end of everything" and "one must have a desire for wealth because there is nothing so miserable as a long life without wealth. So one must try to tap the various sources of wealth."[8] As for the third desire, the living of life in "virtue" to attain happiness in future life, the text says, "This desire is in fact shrouded with some doubts. There is doubt, whether one will have a life (rebirth) at all after his death. But why doubt? There are people who believe only in things which are perceptible and as such do not believe in rebirth because of its imperceptibility. On the other hand people believing in rebirth simply rely upon the evidence of scriptures. There are contradictory opinions also: 'parents,' 'nature,' 'impersonal soul' and 'free will' are considered as causes of birth by different schools. So the question remains whether there is rebirth after death."[9] A string of verses then follows on the "evidence" in favour of rebirth, giving the impression that skeptical medical students needed a lot of convincing on a dubious issue.

The struggle of ancient doctors against traditional Hindu metaphysics may seem pathetic to their modern counterparts till we remind ourselves that this struggle, or, better, this dialectic, has characterized Indian society since time immemorial. In ritual as in art this dialectic has taken the form of asceticism versus eroticism and has been the conflict-laden theme pervading many Hindu lives—Gandhi being the most prominent example of recent times. The ancient doctors were Hindus too, and if they often seem to choke on some of the doctrines of the Hindu world view which they could neither spit out nor swallow, they deserve sympathy rather than censure. One can imagine that for them the doctrine of karma would be especially difficult to accept, and, as Chattopadhyaya has pointed out, this is indeed the case as far as the medical texts are concerned.[10] In some sections of the *Caraka Samhita*, there is talk of diseases resulting from the actions of previous lives and the futility of curative efforts till the effects of the individual karma have been exhausted after taking their own predetermined course. On the other hand, a whole chapter of the *Caraka Samhita*, pointedly silent on the karma of previous lives, confidently proclaims and explains the notion that successful medical treatment depends on four and only four factors—the physician, the medicament (drug or diet), the nursing and certain qualities of the patient.[11] Openly listing a number of diseases that are incurable, the vaids do not make the indefensible claim that they can cure all diseases. They do assert that given the right kind of nursing, a curable disease can always be cured by the right doctor, applying the right therapy and, they might have added, "to hell with the patient's balance on the karmic ledger!" It is the confident scientist, sure of the efficacy of his knowledge and techniques, where there is little room for chance or luck, who writes: "To say that patients adopting the therapeutic measures having the sixteen qualities (of the four factors of medicine) die is not borne out by facts; therapeutic measures can never be ineffective in curable diseases.... As an archer having the knowledge and practice (of archery) shoots arrows with the help of his bow and does not err in hitting a massive body nearby, and thus accomplishes his object, so a physician endowed with his own qualities and other accessories proceeding with the act (of treatment) after proper examination will certainly cure a curable patient without fail. So it is not correct to say that there is no difference between the application and non-application of therapeutic measures."[12]

Ayurveda's disbelief, or at least contradictory attitudes toward, Hindu metaphysics also extends to other facets of Hindu orthodoxy. The cow is rarely mentioned in the venerable company of gods, Brahmins and ancestral spirits, but is discussed where it actually belongs—in the class of animals called *prasaha* that grab and tear off their food—and the text blithely proceeds to discuss the merits of eating beef, especially for those suffering from "rhinitis, irregular fever, dry cough, fatigue, heightened digestion and metabolism (*atyagni*) and wasting of muscles."[13] It is the same with the drinking of alcohol. Hindu lawgivers have often strongly disapproved of alcohol[13] and, as we saw earlier, drinking is frowned upon by most mystical cults that aim at individual self- realization. Ayurveda marches to a different drummer. Though it warns against alcoholic excesses, the attitude toward liqour is generally approving, and occasionally lyrical: "(Wine is) the aid of affectionate embraces of women's bodies full of warmth of youth, the warm clasp of their waists, thighs and full-grown breasts."[15] There is a whole section on the beneficial aspect of the various types of liquor, which ends with the considered conclusion, "Wine in general is exhilarating and nourishing. It eliminates fear, grief and exhaustion. It promotes confidence, energy, intelligence, contentment, nourishment and strength. If taken by good people observing all the rules, it works as an elixir."[16]

I am not suggesting that ancient doctors were dedicated hedonists who took care that their patients' religion never got in the way of their pleasures. I doubt whether Hindus could be or ever have been as unswerving in their pursuit of hedonism as, for instance, the ancient Egyptians or even the Romans. Yet as a modern clinician, intimately involved with his patients, who—quite apart from their individual conflicts—seem to enter the psychotherapeutic situation with the myriad inhibitions of a society whose collective psyche seems to be under the constricting sway of its mystics and saints, I like to build my own private mythology of the "Indian Past", peering into this past through the haze of centuries to contemplate the professions and practices of my colleagues of antiquity, I see little of the public myth of the piety and spirituality of the Satyuga—the golden age of spirituality— that beguiles so many of my countrymen today. Instead I behold the Hindus as a cheerful, energetic and erotic people. They are respecters of death, yes; they are involved in the metaphysical questions that death arises, certainly. Yet they do not let the search for answers to these questions dominate the living of their lives, neither do they with-draw from the possible joys of life because of the probable sorrows.

Leaving aside the doctors, I would now like to talk of their counterparts, the patient, and especially how the tradition still manifests itself in an Indian patient's experience of health and illness. I would like to present my observations in the form of a case-history, that is a narrative form. This way of presentation is of course very traditionally Indian since the preferred medium of instruction and transmission of metaphysical and social thought in India has always been the story. Indians have characteristically sought expression of central and personal and collective meaning through narrative design. Indeed, narrative has been prominently used as a way of thinking, as a way of reasoning about complex situations, and as an inquiry into the nature of reality. Whenever an orthodox Hindu wishes to prove a point or convey what the world is like or ought to be like, he is more than likely to begin his exposition with the sentence, "Let me tell you a story." So, let me tell you a story.

Ramnath is a fifty-one year old man who owns a grocery shop in the oldest part of the city of Delhi. When he came to see me, he was suffering from a number of complaints though he desired my help for only one of them— an unspecified "fearfulness" which became especially acute in the company of his father. This anxiety, less than three years old, was a relatively new development. His migraine headaches, on the other hand, went back to his adolescence. Ramnath attributed them to an excess of "wind" in the stomach which periodically rose up and pressed against the veins in his head. This diagnosis had been arrived at in consultation with doctors of traditional Indian medicine, Ayurveda, and the condition was treated with Ayurvedic drugs, dietary restrictions, as well as liberal doses of aspirin.

Ramnath had always had a nervous stomach though it was never quite as bad as in the months immediately after his marriage, some thirty years ago. Then he had suffered from severe stomach cramps and an alarming weight loss. He was first taken to the hospital by his father where he was x-rayed and otherwise tested. Finding nothing wrong with him, the doctors had prescribed a variety of vitamins and tonics which had not been of much help. Older family members and friends had then recommended a nearby *ojha*—"sorcerer" is too fierce a translation for this mild-mannered professional of ritual excorcism—who diagnosed his condition as the result of magic practised by an enemy. The enemy was further identified as Ramnath's newly acquired father-in-law. The rituals to counteract the enemy magic were expensive, as was the yellowish liquid emetic prescribed by the *ojha* which periodically emptied Ramnath's stomach in gasping heaves. In any event, he was fully cured within two months of the *ojha's* treatment and this particular problem had not recurred.

For the gradually worsening arthritic condition of his right arm, Ramnath had turned to homeopathy after the obligatory but futile consultations with the "allopath", as the western-style doctor is called in India to distinguish him from the practitioners of other medical systems. Homeopathy, too, had failed and Ramnath had then consulted the priest-healer of a local temple who was well-known for his expertise in curing pains of the joints. The priest prescribed a round of *pujas* or prayers together with dietary restrictions such as the avoidance of yoghurt and especially butter. The remedies had not worked.

Ramnath's "fearfulness" had been treated with drugs by various doctors— allopaths as well as homeopaths, the *vaids* of Hindu medicine as well as the *hakims* of Islamic tradition. He had consulted psychiatrists, ingested psychotropic drugs and submitted to electroconvulsive therapy. He had gone through the rituals of two *ojhas* and was thinking of consulting a highly recommended third one.

The only relief came through the weekly *Satsang*, the gathering of the local chapter of the Brahmakumari (lit. "Virgins of Brahma") sect which he had recently joined. The communal meditation and singing gave him a feeling of peace and his nights were no longer as restless. Ramnath was naturally puzzled by the persistence of his anxiety state as well as his other ailments. He had tried to be a good man, he said, both according to the *dharma*, the "right conduct", of his caste and the limits imposed by his own character and predispositions. He had worshipped the gods and attended the services in the temple with regularity and had even contributed a generous sum towards the consecration of the Krishna idol in the temple of his native village in Rajasthan. He did not have any bad habits, he asserted. Tea and cigarettes, yes, but since a couple of years he had abjured even these minor though pleasurable addictions. Yet the anxiety persisted, unremitting and unrelenting.

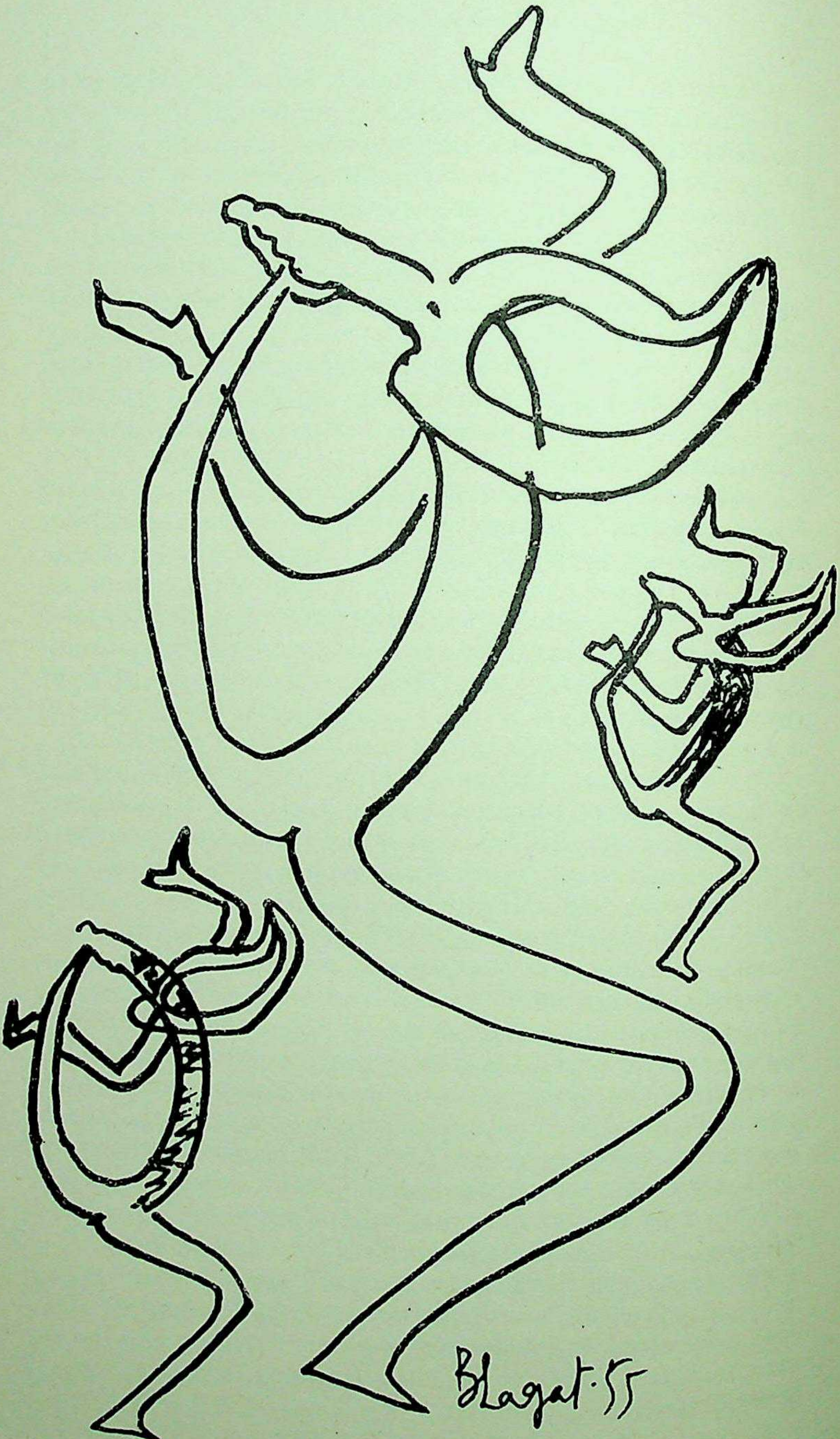
In this essay, contrary to my actual handling of Ramnath's case, I am neither concerned with a psychological understanding of his symptoms nor with the tracing of their genesis in his life history. My purpose is to understand Ramnath's ailments and his efforts toward the restoration of well-being against the background of his cultural tradition. In other words, the aim is to essay a cultural—rather than a psycho-analysis of Ramnath's condition which will help us in becoming explicitly aware of the notions of health and illness in the Indian tradition.

At first glance, Ramnath's cognitive space in matters of illness and well-being seems incredibly cluttered. Gods and spirits, community and family, food and drink, personal habits and character, all seem to be somehow intimately involved in the maintenance of health. Yet these and other additional factors such as biological infection, social pollution and cosmic displeasure, which Hindus would also acknowledge as causes of ill-health, only point to the recognition of a person's simultaneous existence in different orders of being. To use Western categories, from the first birth cry to the last breath, an individual exists in his *soma*, his *psyche* and his *polis*. In other words, a person is simultaneously a body, a self and a social being. Ramnath's experience of his illness may appear alien to non-Hindus only because of the fact that the body, the self and the polis do not possess fixed, immutable meanings across cultures. The concept of the body and the understanding of its processes are not quite the same in India as they are in the West. The self too—the Hindu "subtle body"—is not primarily a psychological category in India though it does include something of the Western psyche. Similarly, for most Hindus, the *polis* not only consists of living members of the family and community, but of ancestral spirits, other spirit-beings, as also the familiar gods and goddesses who populate the Indian cosmos.

Subjectively then, a Hindu is inclined to believe that his illness can reflect a disturbance in any one of the orders of being while the symptoms may also be manifested in the other orders. If a treatment, say in the bodily order, fails, he is quite prepared to reassign the cause of the illness to a different order and undergo its particular curing regimen—the *pujas* or the exorcisms, for instance—without losing his regard for other treatment methods.

A pluralistic openness and willingness to accept all orders of existence as possible sources of ill-health, however, does not mean that each can indiscriminately substitute for the other in case of a particular disease or class of diseases. For example, till recently, the occurrence of measles, small pox, chicken pox and cholera was assumed by most Hindus as due to the visitations of certain disease-specific goddesses. The propiation of these goddesses—who were known by different names in different parts of the country—was the main treatment method.

The involvement of all orders of being in health and illness also means that a Hindu is generally inclined to seek more than one cause for his illness in especially intractable cases. He tends to review these causes as complementary rather than exclusive, and arranges them in a hierarchical order by identifying an immediate cause as well as others that are more peripheral and remote. The causes are arranged in kinds of concentric circles, with the outer circle including all the inner ones. To continue with our example: Ramnath, in concordance with Ayurvedic theory which provides the governing paradigm for the explanation of physiological processes in Hindu India, may identify his arthiritic pain as a humeral disequilibrium, say an excess of *vayu* or wind, which needs to be balanced through diet, drugs and external applications. The disequilibrium may further felt to be compounded by personal conduct—bad thoughts, habits,—which, in turn, demand changes at the level of the self. The fact that the disease persists or is manifested with much stubborn intensity, may be linked with his astrologically bad times, needing palliative measures, such as the *puja*. The astrological 'fault' will probably be further traced back to the bad *karma* of a previous birth about which, finally, nothing can be done—except, perhaps, the cultivation of a stoic endurance with the help of the weekly meetings of the Brahmakumari sect.



Bhagat 55

Literature and Social Change: A Sociological Perspective

Yogendra Singh

There are several perspective from which the relationship between literature and social change can be examined*. First, literature as a creative form of portrayal of human condition relates closely to cultural and existential forces of human life and society which are historically conditioned. This historical and social conditioning of literature constitutes an important dimension from which the relationship between literature and processes of social change can be observed. Theoretical debates have emerged in sociology of literature on formulating modalities of this relationship. Marxism, structuralism, structural-phenomenology and ethno-sociology etc. have evolved a variety of perspectives on how social conditioning of literature, its styles, themes, ideology processes of symbolization etc. on the one hand and on the other dialectics of literature with social processes can be used as indicators of social change. Implicit in this treatment are notions of structure, social and cultural consciousness, historical forces of social transformation and its direction. These constitute the framework for analysis of literary works or works of art and its conjuncture with processes of social change.

Secondly, the relationship between literature and social change can be studied in terms of levels at which interaction between the two is observed in society. A distinction can, in this context be made between micro-history and macro-history, between biography of the litterateur and his literary creation, between folk or oral tradition of creativity and formal stylised written traditions. Each of these levels has an orientation which explicate how conceptual frameworks both of literatureand social change are closely entwined. From micro- and macro- perspectives of social change, one way witness the interface of literature with social processes at the levels of specific historical conjunctures of social structure and literary consciousness. We find it in local or folk traditions.

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We may also seek the relationship between literature and social change at the macro-historical levels of transitions, the major phases of social evolution, such as simple societies, pre-industrial-fedual societies, industrial-capitalist societies, the post-industrial and socialist societies. These historical phases of social transformation can be then culturally configurated in which literature and literary traditions form important phases in transition. Effort can be made to seek patterning of form, style, ideology, theme and orientation etc. of literature in consonance with the patterning of social stages of historial transformation. This type of analysis of literature in relation to processes of social change has been undertaken by several scholars. Several questions that arise in this context form a basis for debate.

An important question is of the place of a litterateur in relation to his work. What does a literary work symbolise? What social processes does it manifest? What is the rule of an artist's individuality, his personality or his perceptions on the human condition in his literary productions, its style and form? Vexing theoretical questions have arisen in sociology in its treatment of culture and art on these issues. Most theoretical debate in sociology of literature is of this making. There is a broad agreement, despite differences about details that an artist or a litterateur is not merely a passive registry or mirror image of social and historical processes of society. He has his creative individuality and freedom which manifests at several levels: the unique, the comparable and the universal. This phenomenon only exemplifies the basic nature of man in society, that "man is like no other man, man is like some other men, and man is like all other men'! This notion of levels in the structure of literary consciousness, its creative forms and ideological orientations is helpful in dealing with many complex questions on the relationship between literature and social change. These questions relate to social and cultural functions of literature in society: its intrinsic humanism, its aesthetics, its projection of universal values which have a transcultural appeal to mankind cutting across boundaries of time and space. In stylization of these values lies the uniqueness of a litterateur, his own creativity, his individuality and specific merits of his empathy. At the transcultural and humanistic level, literature serves as a medium of affirmation of social institutions and values which are universal. Yet it also constitutes critical reflection on contemporary and past institutions and values of society.

Criticism and critical consciousness are qualities in literature which endow with it functions of not merely portraying but also initiating social change. The notion of criticism which to begin with was differentiated in Marxist and non-Marxist literary traditions has recently found new expression in sociology that tend towards convergence, especially in phenomenological and critical schools of sociology. Marx's own notion of criticism emerged from his perception of the changing role of the writer in society, first as an empathic portrayer of societal contradictions and its class character and exploitation and then secondly, as a mechanism to generate praxeological edge into revolutionary consciousness. In his later works revolutionary praxis became central to his notion of criticism. "Criticism is no longer an end itself, but now simply a means. Indignation is its essential pathos and denunciation its principle task". Central to this notion of criticism is the world-view of a socialist society. Subsequently, in critical school of sociology and in neo- Marxist tradition of literary criticism the focus shifted to characterization of worldview itself, such as the notion of 'whole' in Lukacs of which 'mediation' and 'mimesis' were integral literary crafts. In other words, the function of literary work was to capture the totality of social reality as a form of 'reflection', not a mirror image of the world but a mediatory or empathic portrayal of its specific reality in the framework of the 'whole' or the worldview. Lukacs was critical of surrealistic, naturalistic and expressionistic literary forms not for the manner in which these portrayed specific aspects of human condition but for their failure to present them in the background of the 'whole', such as the system of industrial capitalism and its class-character. It is this element alone which links the processes of literary creativity with the processes of social change and social praxis.

The critical school of sociology reiterates the empathic and mediatory role of the writer or litterateur in presentation of social reality. It also affirms the dialectical quality of literary consciousness. It differs, however, in formulation of the notion of 'whole'. Instead of according a universality or autonomy to this concept it locates its principle in the historicity of the artist and the structure of his social consciousness. In its extreme form, such as the notion of 'negative dialectics' of Adorno, it rejects the very possibility of a mediatory principle in the 'whole' since what is recognized is 'constant negation', a destructive resistance to setting the world within a single principle that tends to endow it with 'identity'. On this point, we discover fundamental differences of approach between the Marxist and a certain tradition of critical school of sociology. Adorno's notion of negative dialectics has implicit in its formulation streak of nihilism or even anarchism which would alienate literature from understanding the processes of social change.

Despite varied directions in which the notion of criticism has evolved in sociology, its implication for establishing closer relationship between literature and social change cannot be denied. Most literary works embody consciousness of values and ideals in dialectical response of social and historical forces of society. The writer embodies this dialects in his work through which he seeks to evoke new awareness among his readers. This awareness serves both functions of reinforcement of some and replacement or transformation of other values and institutions. Like a social movement, literary contributions too have system-integrating and system-transformative or institution changing potential. A truly creative literary work seeks to integrate human relationships and institutions at a higher level of humanistic awareness. This characteristic itself serves to de-mystify partisan or exploitative institutions and values. All great works of literature have this quality, of representing history and also transcending it. Only through this quality does literary production, or work of art offer a perspective on social change which is different from that of sociologists or social scientists.

A social science perspective on change in society builds its conceptual and theoretical frames drawing from history, as also from observation of social and cultural patterns in society using empirical tools. These observations gain theoretical power if historical and empirical observations of changes in society are also intuitively integrated with a sense of perspective on vital aspects of the process of change. A valid approach to the study of social change should combine elements of scientific methodology with those of artistic creativity or what has been called, "Sociological imagination". Despite all this, a sociological treatment of change seeks confirmation of the results of its study in the principles of validity and verification. It is delimited by scientific norms and space-time frames of historicity. A literary work on social change may tend to be realistic, representative or quite often contemporaneous in nature, but it generally has quality of space-time transcendence.

This characteristic of literary contributions in all its forms, poetry, novel, short story etc. endows literature added significance in the implication that it may have for understanding social change. Its implications may be time-bound, contemporaneous, futuristic or revivalistic, but in more than one sense a literary work has a time-less significance. Literature as a work of social criticism inheres both these aspects: understanding and critique of specific institutions of society and empathy with universal condition of man. Otherwise, it may be difficult to explain production of masterpieces of literary creation in societies even during periods of their social and moral decadence. A work of literature is historically sensitized or may be socially conditioned, but not quite the whole of it. Its historicity is qualified by its capacity for transcendence. As such, a work of art, has critical implications for understanding social change or for generating forces for social change which have more enduring and much wider significance.

Another complex question in a study of role of literature in social change refers to the operational relationship between the two. How does literature bring about social change? Sociologists have been dealing with this question since a long time under the rubric of cultural theory of social change. Literature, in this context is treated as a culture product of society. It is, therefore, assumed to be an indicator of processes of social change. Configurations of literary and other artistic work are formulated based on themes, ideologies, styles, and several other attributes of literature to show how their sequence, decline or ascendence, or their fluctuations through specific periods co-vary with changes in social and economic institutions of society. Thus, a relationship between literature and social change is postulated. There are several attempts of this kind available in sociology and literary historiography despite variations in ideological underpinning of the analysis. On this basis, it could be demonstrated how literary works of early industrial capitalism differ in social concerns, approach to social and human issues from those of the latter capitalism or in the so called age of the post-industrial society. There is sufficient ground for valid inferences about the relationship between literature and social change through this approach. In our own country, literary historiography has quite often followed this approach with much productive results. Literature of the period of national movement differs configurationally from later day contributions during the period of social, economic and political reforms, their institutional and human implications. In most Hindi novels and short stories one might witness an array of themes relating to these forces of social change. These sociological evocations contribute to social change by inculcating among readers new awareness, but simultaneously these also exemplify the forces and tendencies towards social change.

The cultural theory approach to understanding the relationship between literature and social change does not, however, examine the processes through which literature generates new social awareness which possibly in a cumulative fashion triggers forces of social change in society at some stage of its unfoldment. It identifies processes of change through historical sequence in which dominant literary configuration co-vary with those of social, economic and political institutions of society. The focus upon these configurations no doubt makes the task of analysis simpler but does not explain how literature generates social awareness conducive to social change. New methods of cultural analysis, offering dialectical treatment of the structure of symbols and their transformation have located this process in the processes within the symbolic systems. It is postulated that literary symbols, to the extent that they are significant and critical seek to encounter other symbolic discourses through dialectical process of their opposition or negation. A litterateur contributes to generation of critical consciousness by presentation of his symbols dialectically, as a counterpoint to the symbols he seeks to annul. This may be conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit in his literary production, but this forms an integral part of his creativity and his commitment. This process of annulment on the one hand has a praxeological orientation and on the other contributes to extension and enlargement of the meanings of the symbols through which literature seeks to influence the processes of social change. The process of symbolic extension is not without a social framework, that of class, community, ethnicity etc., through which literary symbolic extension, which Lukacs called processes of 'mediation' and 'mimesis' becomes a social force, generates social movements and brings about social change. It is yet to be studied how this complex process of generating a milieu for social praxis through literature and its symbolic systems indeed takes place in society. There are, however, studies where the relationship between cultural or ideological symbols and social praxis have been observed. An important case to which one can refer in this regard is the tribal Devi movements in various parts of our own country.

This brings us to yet another implication of this analysis of the relationship between literature and social change. It relates to dialectics or tensions in literary traditions themselves. During the recent past, insurgent literature as against the mainstream literary tradition has emerged with focus upon an alternative cultural project and ideology which is in opposition to the dominant tradition. Dalit literature in India offers yet another though largely similar example for an opposite literary paradigm. In our country we notice a very long history of such counter-literary traditions in the folk culture and folk literature. Though mainly oral in terms of communication a large part of the folk literary symbols expressed an ideology of resistance towards and annulment of dominant and oppressive social and cultural institutions of society. Much of it was later selectively incorporated in the mainstream literature no doubt, but the former has much more praxeological significance. Historians have recently been analysing the role of such literary productions for tribal, peasant and ethnic movement in society. The process of symbolic transference and extension has been linked by some historians, especially those who are studying micro-historical movements in society to processes of insurgency and violence against oppressive social institutions. Not all such configuration of symbols has its basis in literature but it shows how literary contributions could not only sensitise people but also motivate them to action projects with potential for social change.

We have examined the relationship between literature and social change from the perspective of the litterateur, his structure of consciousness, from the viewpoint of literary production, its ideology and significance as a source of social criticism and finally, as indicator of social change itself, using the cultural theory approach. We have also seen how literature symbolises not only the configurations of social transformation through history, but its internal symbolic structure itself is governed by a dialectical principle which has praxeological implications. It generates social consciousness among people for bringing about change, some times revolutionary social movements. In all these facets of interaction of literature with social processes one would have to recognise that literature plays a role in social change at the level of micro-history, the personality or biography of the writer and the macro-history, the social structure and cultural traditions of society. No doubt both these levels converge in the act of literary creation, but its dialectics bears relevance for understanding the contribution that literature makes in the process of social change.

At the macro-historical level, interaction between literature and society finds expression in two forms, first, in the configurations of the literary forms, meanings and ideology representing conjunctures of societal and cultural forces specific to each such configuration, and secondly, in the dialectical relationship between the literary traditions of the folk, Dalit and insurgents and the mainstream literary tradition. The two traditions of literary creativity have major paradigmatic disjuncture, yet they also closely interact and enrich one another. The process of this interaction itself initiates changes not only in the literary paradigms themselves but also in their capacity to bring about or sustain changes in society.

While we analyse the dimensions in which literature and social change are seen to be related, we must also recognise the limits from which any such relationship can be characterised. Social change is a complex social process and social sciences do not as yet have a sufficiently powerful theory to explain it or predict its course. It offers plausible conceptual schemes through which social changes, especially in the long term perspective could be understood and partially explained, but social sciences lack a formal theory of social change. The contribution that literature makes to the processes of social change and the manner in which it serves to function as an indicator of change in society should be seen as contingent causes together with other forces or factors of social change. Despite its contingent nature, literature has both a short-term (micro-historical) and long-term (macro-historical) implications for evoking and influencing the consciousness of people in society. The structure of people's consciousness is not entirely exhausted by the structure of literary consciousness or values. Literature affects only a certain part of people's value-orientations and ideology, a great portion of which endures in their life with tenacity. If one could distinguish between the existential or utilitarian domains of values in people's life from those which have a transcendental or non-utilitarian significance, then it may probably be surmised that changes first occur at the levels of existential utilitarian values. This new consciousness only very slowly extends to the other domain in course of time. This is what explains cultural lag in the process of social change. The changes in economy, technology and other existential aspects of life are easily accepted and introduced, but those in core values and beliefs, such rituals and religious consciousness are not so easily achieved. The basic or core values of people in society not only take long time to undergo changes but often they escape the prospect of change by adaptive improvisations incorporating new values or ideologies in their normative structure. The hierarchy of these values presents yet another principle of the limit in the process of social change. It also probably defines the boundary within which the relationship between literature and social change can be observed meaningfully.

The Mahabharata as Theatre: Peter Brook and the Great Epic of India

Barbara Stoler Miller

The drama of moral chaos and war that lies at the heart of the *Mahabharata* is intensified in the visual poetry of Peter Brook's version through techniques that derive from ancient Indian theatre. The work of Brook, writer Jean-Claude Carriere, and the international company of actors who perform the play is in the tradition of Indian poets and performers who have exploited the theatrical dimensions of the *Mahabharata*. Ancient Indian theorists call drama "visual poetry," as opposed to "aural poetry," because it presents us with a world to see. The word for acting in Sanskrit is *abhinaya*, the language of gesture that has been a distinctive feature of the Indian stage from the earliest times. Particular importance is given to the use of hands and eyes for translating ideas, objects, and emotions into aesthetic statements. Arduous training is necessary to perfect *abhinaya*. Acting in Indian theatre is considered a discipline (*yoga*) whereby the actor and acted become one. Gestures, however carefully learned and conventionalized, must not be mechanical; they must appear ceremonious, graceful and spontaneous. An actor or actress, like a *yogi*, must cultivate a spontaneity that transcends learned conventions, artificiality and limitations of the stage. It is intense concentration that allows the performer to become absorbed in creating scenes that put the audience in intimate touch with vital aspects of nature and human psychology. According to ancient Indian myth, the original of drama was a holy presentation that the gods offered to give ethical instruction through diversion when people were no longer listening to the scriptures.

Most scholars would agree that the *Mahabharata* has its roots in events that took place in the period following the entry of the Indo-Aryan speaking nomadic tribes into northwestern India around 1200 B.C. The composition of the epic began as these tribes settled in the river valleys of the Indus and the Ganges during the first millennium B.C., when their nomadic sacrifical cults began to develop into the religious traditions of Hinduism. The work has stylistic and mythological roots in the ancient ritual hymns of the *Rig Veda* and narrative sources in oral tales of a tribal war fought in the Punjab early in the first millennium B.C. As the tradition was taken over by professional storytellers and intellectuals, many sorts of legend, myth, and speculative thought were absorbed, including the *Bhagavad Gita*, which belongs to the layer of the epic that took form around the first century A.D. In its present form the *Mahabharata*, consists of over one hundred thousand verses divided into eighteen books. The martial saga has been expanded into an encyclopedic repository of ancient Indian myths, ideals, and concepts. Indians say of it: "What is not here is not found anywhere else."

Just as Greek culture has drawn on the Homeric epics to represent its values, so Hindu culture has drawn upon the *Mahabharata*, as well as the *Ramayana*, to represent its values, dominant among which is the idea of order and sacred duty (*dharma*). Appropriate to the authority of their social position as warrior-kings, the epic heroes embody order and sacred duty (*dharma*), while their foes, whether human or demonic, embody chaos (*adharma*). The ritualization of warrior life and the demands of sacred duty define the religious and moral meaning of heroism throughout the *Mahabharata*. Acts of heroism are characterized less by physical prowess than by *dharma*, often involving extraordinary forms of sacrifice, penance, devotion to a divine authority, and spiritual victory over evil.

In *The Shifting Point* (Harper and Row,1987), Peter Brook speaks of *dharma* in the theatre:

> The *Mahabharata* as a whole acquires its concrete meaning from the fact that dharma cannot be defined, what can be said about something that can't be defined, if one wants to avoid philosophical abstractions? For no one can be helped in life by abstractions.
>
> The *Mahabharata* does not attempt to explain the secret of dharma, but lets it become a living presence. It does this through dramatic situations which force dharma into the open.
>
> When one enters into the drama of the *Mahabharata*, one is living with dharma. And when one has passed through the work, one has a feeling for what dharma is and what is the opposite, adharma. Here lies the responsibility of the theatre: what a book cannot convey, what no philosopher can truly explain, can be brought into our understanding by the theatre. Translating the untranslatable is one of its roles.

In Indian terms, the success of a drama is the resolution of emotional disharmonies in the microcosm of the theatre by exploring deeper relations that bind apparent conflicts of existence. The manifestation of these relations produces in the audience the intense aesthetic experience called *rasa*. Though usually translated by "sentiment" or "mood," *rasa* more literally means the "flavor" or "taste" of something. *Rasa* is the flavor that the dramatist and performers distill from ordinary emotional situations in order to present them for aesthetic appreciation. Human emotion, the basic material of *rasa*, is divided by theorists into nine categories: the erotic, the heroic, the comic, the pathetic, the furious, the horrible, the disgusting, the marvelous, and the calm. The intricate relationships among these underlie all Indian literature, beginning with the Sanskrit epics.

Consonant with ancient Indian oral and dramatic traditions, the Brook/Carriere version of the *Mahabharata* begins with a prologue on the creation of the epic itself. The first character to speak is Vyasa, the author to whom the epic is traditionally attributed. Formally, he plays the role that the director, or *sutradhara*, plays in the prologue of traditional Indian theatre. Vyasa's role penetrates deep into the epic; he is coexistent with it and intimately involved with the actors. He is both the epic's author and the sage grandfather of the epic heroes. He is a figure whose presence defines and animates the drama he inhabits. The story of Vyasa's ancestry allows the audience to enter the imaginative universe of the *Mahabharata* from its origin.

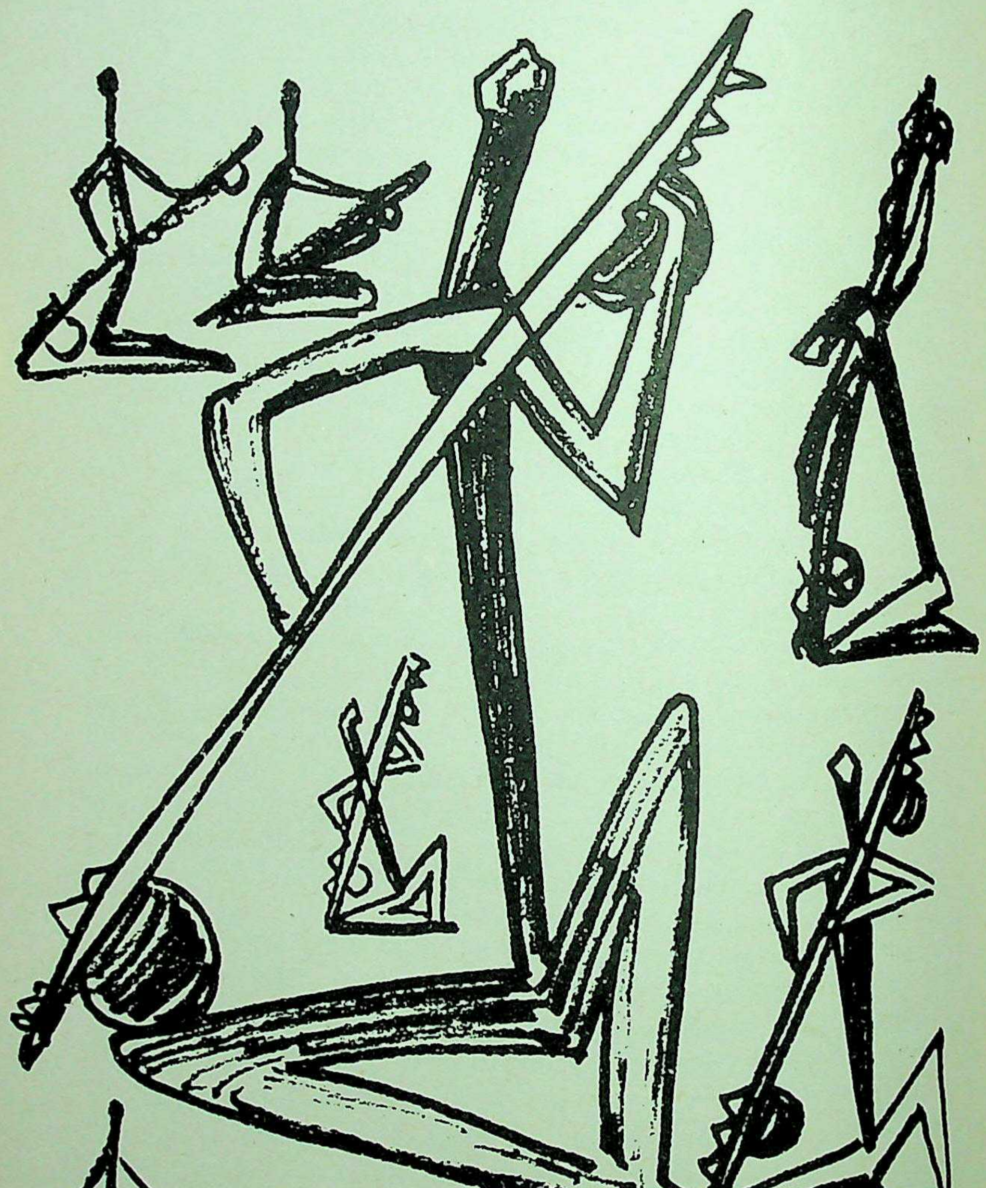
Within the epic text, the story is narrated by the priest Vaisampayana, a disciple of Vyasa, at an assembly of warriors come together for the snake sacrifice being held by Janamjeya, a descendant of the Pandavas. The birth of Vyasa is narrated in response to Janamjeya's request to hear the *whole* epic text. In the Brook/Carriere version, Vyasa relates his own story at the suggestion of his scribe, Ganesha. The audience is Vyasa's companion, a young boy who is a descendant of the Pandavas. The narrator begins by telling of King Vasu, through whose city a river flowed. A mountain fell in love with the river, waylaid her, and begot twins of her. The king freed her by kicking the mountain with his foot. In gratitude, when her children were born she gave them to the king. He made the boy chief of his army and married the girl, whose beauty was so great that thought of her made him spill his seed, which eventually fell into the river Yamuna, where it impregnated a nymph who had been cursed by Brahma to become a fish. When she was in her tenth month she was caught by fishermen who pulled human twins from her belly and presented the marvelous pair to their king. He raised the boy as his son, but the girl, who smelled like a fish, he gave to a fisherman. She plied a ferry on the river Yamuna, and so Parasara came to see her when he was travelling on a pilgrimage. The "bull among hermits" was instantly smitten by her beauty and began making love to her. She protested that there were holy men standing on both sides of the river watching. Then he created a fog that "seemed to cover the entire region in darkness." Again she protested, pleading her virginity and filial piety. The great sage was pleased by her virtue and promised that his love would not ruin her virginity; then he granted her a boon. She chose as her boon that her body would always smell delicious. On the same day that she lay with Parasara, she gave birth to Vyasa on an island in the river Yamuna. He stood before his mother and set his mind on asceticism. "When you think of me, I shall appear to you if any task needs to be done."

The mating of the hermit with the fish-girl and the birth of Vyasa is an epic play-within-a-play that echoes the obscure origins and kinship relations governing the entire *Mahabharata*. The epic poet's birth and descent, like the birth and history of the epic heroes, is a story of seduction, restored virginity, and substitute fathers (human and divine). Vyasa, like Karna, the first-born of the Pandavas, is born outside and before his mother's marriage. Just as Karna's mother, Kunti, is the hub of a multivalent set of relations that constitute the epic story, so Vyasa's mother, Satyavati, is the hub of a set of relations that constitute the formal prologue of the poem. Later, when the continuity of the Bharata lineage is threatened, Satyavati calls on Vyasa to sire sons. Not only does he carry on the Bharata line, but he teaches the *Mahabharata* to the bards so that the story will be passed down through the ages.

The story of Vyasa birth is not an isolated epic event. The birth's of the epic's main characters occur in equally dramatic episodes in which powerful desire initiates action. King Santanu's passion for an irresistible woman, who is in reality the river goddess Ganga, results in the birth of Bhishma, who later renounces his claim to the throne and takes a terrible vow of celibacy to allow Santanu to marry Satyavati, so sweet-smelling now that she seduces the king with her fragrance. These episodes, like the scenes of the births of Pandu and Dhritarasthra and their sons (the Pandavas and the Kauravas, achieve their aesthetic and moral impact through the perennial human conflict between sacred duty (*dharma*) and desire (*kama*). Though the Pandava and Kaurava cousins should be united by common blood and ambitions, instead they are deadly enemies. The unbridled desire that dominates th Kali Yuga causes the Kauravas to frustrate their cousins" rights and eventually usurp their patrimony. Bases desires motivate the Kauravas to engage Yudhisthira in a crooked dice game that he plays with ritual obsessiveness, losing. Although the participants in the dice game are often warned about the danger of their course, once they begin the end it inevitable—noble heroes become trapped in a degenerating world over which they have no control. Even *dharma* cannot escape the demands of the age, and it too falls victim to Kali Yuga. The slow degeneration of Santanu's clan culminates in its final disaster—the scions of Vyasa become engaged in a mutually destructive war, whose drama their ancestor himself is directing.

The actual war, which ends with the destruction of both armies, is represented in a series of dramatic confrontations and moral crises. Exemplary among these is the mystical dialogue between the mighty Pandava warrior Arjuna and Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita*, a dialogue that informs the entire epic and underlies the Brook/Carriere version. Before the war begins, Duryodhana and Arjuna approach Krishna to seek his alliance—he refuses to take arms, but allows them to chose between himself and his troops. Arjuna chooses Krishna as his charioteer, and Duryodhana is delighted to have Krishna's troops for the Kaurava army. In the face of doing battle against his relations, Arjuna's nerve fails. Krishna's arguments on why Arjuna must overcome his uncertainty and fear of the battle contain ideas that resonate throughout the entire epic. We can sympathize with the warrior's impulse to shrink from the violence of the human condition and can also learn from what Krishna teaches him about his own and others' mortality. Krishna's exposition of the relationship between death, sacrifice, and devotion explores the idea that one must heroically confront death in order to transcend the limits of ordinary existence.

For Arjuna, the epic warriors, and the audience of the *Mahabharata* Krishna is a perplexing figure. He is a companion and teacher, as well as a potent god who commands devotion. Krishna's mythology suggests that he was originally a tribal hero who was transformed into a cult divinity, becoming an incarnation of cosmic power who periodically descends to earth to accomplish the restoration of order in times of chaos. The interweaving of mundane and cosmic levels of his activity throughout the epic makes his role as divine charioteer to Arjuna more comprehensible. From the start, Arjuna and the epic audience know that Krishna is no common mortal. Despite his human foibles, he speaks with the authority of omniscience as his divinity unfolds in the terrible spectacle of destruction. In the Brook/Carriere version, the dramatization of Krishna's enigmatic presence reveals basic contradictions inherent in the epic universe.



Return to Mandhata

Randhir Khare

I

A temple bell rang. Its metallic peal swung away with the wind and drifted out across the bridge and dissolved. Silence. The wind subsided. A dry peepal leaf floated down from a branch and fell at my feet. I looked at it balancing on the tall points of grass, then involuntarily picked it up.

"Miss Caranby," a voice wheezed behind me, "your room is ready. It is number six. A VVIP room."

I turned to the source of the sound. Mr. Gupta, the Assistant Engineer, stretched a smile right across from ear to ear, held it there for a while then released it, cheeks slipping back to a weak and trembling chin. "Shall I have your bags taken to the room?" Before I could respond, Gupta yelled, "Mithailal," but no one answered. "Mithailal, O Mithailal, I'm sorry Miss Caranby, this man is nowhere about. I shall go and see." He left. I didn't wait for Gupta to return but instead picked up my haversack and suitcase and walked into the Rest House in search of room number six. Since there were just six rooms, it was easy to find. By the time Gupta returned, I had already settled in, had a cold bath and sprawled in an easy chair.

"Mithailal has gone to the market. He will return presently. I hope you are comfortable. I must go now." And he was gone. I heard him stride down the corridor. The jeep engine started up, roared and left the gate.

I returned to the chair and relaxed. A drowsiness edged its way through my body.

Moonlight streamed through the parted curtain and poured across the bed. I opened my eyes. The room was filled with a glow. I stood up and walked to the window, looked out between the parted curtains. Beyond the boundary fence the land sloped into the Narmada river—churning and gurgling. Across the river—clusters of homesteads clung to each other, huddling along the hillsides. Lights blurring through a fine film of smoke. Above it all— reaching upwards, a bare rugged crag loomed like the hump of a dormant prehistoric creature. My eyes followed the line of the hill, stopping at a lone stone pillar. The silhouette resembled a phallus.

Then the feeling grew. It was as if a plant was growing from my navel, spreading rapidly till I was covered. I could literally feel its delicate climbing tendrils curling around me. A throbbing in my body. My heart almost bursting in my ears. Something was happening to me. Something I couldn't understand. Footsteps. I could hear footsteps. The beat of drums came closer. Where was he? He hadn't come in time. And then, a knocking on the door. Who was that? Who? The knocking became louder. I couldn't stand it. The latch was rattled. I turned away from the window and faced the door. I advanced slowly. I listened. The knock again, louder. I opened the door.

Someone stood outside. I could hear his breathing. It was him. He had come. He stood outside. The power of his presence calmned me. I stopped shivering.

"Madam," he said, "I'm Mithailal. Is your room comfortable?" His voice was soft. I stood looking at him. A dirty cloth was wrapped around his head. His clothes were frayed and hung on his body as if on a hanger. In the glow of the corridor lights his eyes were luminous. A sloping moustache half covered a wide strong mouth. his stubbled chin was square and firm.

"I have brought food," he said.

"Oh yes," I replied, feeling embarrassed for having stared at him for so long. "Come." I put on the light. He laid the food out on the small table, looked around the room, picked up my day's clothes from the bed and placed them on a sofa, then proceeded to settle the bed for the night. The simple tasks were done with a sort of ritualistic care.

"When you have eaten," he finally said, "put the tray outside." He walked towards the door and stopped to say something. Comtemplated. Walked out.

"Thank you," I said.

"It is my duty," he replied, closing the door.

When I looked towards the window once more I noticed that the curtain had been drawn shut. Mithailal must have done that, I thought. After dinner, I took off all my clothes and moved under the sheets. The smooth touch of the cloth along the length of my body was comforting. I closed my eyes.

The knocking on the door began again. As steadily as the first time that I had heard it. I opened the door, he came in quickly.

"They won't find us now. This is safe here," he said. We stood looking at each other in the dark. I couldn't see him. I could only feel his presence. I knew he was standing very close to me. I could hear him breathing softly. Then his fingers touched my arm. A warmth rose.

A rush of footsteps grew nearer till they were at the door. With the crushing blow of a heavy ramrod, a part of the woodwork gave in. A hand appeared and a body...then another and another. I rushed to the corner of the room. They caught him just when he tried to run to the window. In the torchlight, I saw the spearhead glint as it was drawn back and flung. The weapon hit him in the chest and threw him off his feet. He grunted like a wounded bull and tried to get up. His legs quivered, his arms shook. His head went slack and he fell back. The torch-bearers lit up my corner of the room. They approached...

II

The morning was still grey and listless when I drew open the curtains. The room was as it had been the night before—the haversack and suitcase neatly stacked to one side, my clothes folded on the couch, the furniture in place. Out in the distance, temple bells were ringing and the sounds of life gradually took on a louder rumble till it seemes that a giant wheel had been set in motion.

Later, Mithailal brought my breakfast in his ritualistic manner. There was something about him which sent a tingle of fimilairty through me. It unsettled me because I had never seen him before...and yet, yet, I felt I knew him.

"Gupta Sahib is waiting to see you," he said finally.

The man with the elastic smile came in later, heaving himself into a chair.

"I know Miss Caranby," he said haltingly and cleared his throat, "you have come with a letter from Delhi, from the Home Ministry. But you will still have to give me some details for our records." He took out a four-page cyclostyled form from his file and started writing. "You keep answering my questions and I will write, okay?"

"Helen Caranby. Thrity three. Astro-Physicist..." He went on writing on quickly—all the dry details of my present life. And completing the entries, said, "Though I know you are a tourist and all that, could you just remember one or two things?—First—no taking photographs in this area—that is: of this Rest House, of the construction site of our new dam, all this area. Secondly, please report every evening to the police station here. You don't have to go personally, just ring them on the phone. You see you are a guest and we value your safety. Thirdly," he cleared his throat again, got up and walked to the window. "See that part of the hill? There—where that white stone is standing up? that whole area is out of bounds. Three deaths have already taken place from there. People have fallen from there—right down to the rocks below. The police think it is suicide. The people believe it to be human sacrifice. They were all women."

"But why human sacrifice?" I asked.

"Because Miss Caranby—a giant dam is being built here. It is to appease the Gods. Often this happens in our country. There have been cases where sacrifice of children have taken place to appease the Gods before a big construction has started. Also there is a long history of human sacrifice in this region. I will show you an extract from the Nimar District Gazetteer on this region of Mandhata. It was written in 1908 by one of your people. You will understand when you read it." There was an uncomfortable pause. Then he said, "But why have you come here straight from Delhi? There is so much to see in our country. In comparison Mandhata is small and insignificant. Is it a personal reason that you cannot explain?"

I could not explain. I could not explain anything because I myself was unable to decipher my motive. How could I explain all the dreams I had? How could I tell him something had drawn me to this place like a magnet? That the force was still working on me. That I was heading inexhorably towards some terrible truth... A truth that would break me and maybe offer me an explanation to the numerous enigmas of my life. Enigmas I had never been able to decipher. One of two children with parents who were both doctors—never around when they were needed most. I grew up, married and divorced a doctor, unable to have any children—slept around with men till I hardened my shell at thirty. And then this—this strange experience. This strange inexplicable experience. Drawn to an unknown place in an unknown country. And a man with an elastic smile asking me why I was there.

"You needn't answer," said Gupta reassuringly. "It was only a friendly question." He left after many thank yous and handshakes. There was something soft and succulent about his touch. Something that made me uneasy. I had also noticed that while we were seated, he kept looking at me from the corner of his eye. Even his fingers clung a little too long after each handshake.

Mithailal came in. "Gupta Sahib said to give this to you," he said, handing me a slim printed booklet. "It is all about this place."

"MANDHATA"the cover read, "EXTRACT OF MANDHATA, MORTAKKA etc FROM NIMAR DISTRICT GAZETTEER 1908."

I settled down to read, almost immediately. I hadn't noticed that Mithailal was still standing beside me. "Oh," I said, with a start, "Is there something else?"

"No," he said and was about to walk away but stopped as if anticipating a question from me.

"What is this Gupta Sahib says about murders?"

"Murders? Those were not murders. Those were offerings. Everyone knows that. And there will be more."

"How do you know this?"

"How? It is simple. It is a tradition. Read this," he said pointing to the booklet with quiet assurance.

"But why all women?"

"All women," he said, "who could not have children." He left the room.

I began reading the booklet. Each line stood up from the page like a swollen vein. It pulsed. I knew it all. I knew Mandhata. The years fell away from me like dust and I remembered. Mandhata, where the narmada and Kavery rivers met and the hornstone slate was green and the deep pools of water were alive with fish. Pilgrims came there often, throwing grain...and the large mouths gaped up from the dark water and swallowed. I too was a pilgrim there— from Khandwa. I remembered the marketplace, the narrow stone-paved lanes climbing up along the hillsides and the white-washed houses. Twenty-two brahmins would come daily and make three thousand mud lingams which they'd offer to the sacred Narmada. And the yellow sandstone temple of Siddhanath, I remembered that too. It was said that the lingam in the central shrine was white. When the Emperor Aurangzeb came to the temple he gazed upon the lingam. In it he saw the form of a pig. Angered, he threw the lingam into a fire. It became black. Often I touched the smooth black stone. This always made me weak.

I was childless then and they took me to the sacred wall where women wanting children painted Swastiks.

And Ravan Nala—the stream which harbours on one bank a crumbled statue. Many, thought this to be the statue of Ravan. It turned out to be the statue of Kali. She had a girdle of snakes, held a sword, mace and skull in her hands—her stomach caved in with hunger for human lives. A scorpion was carved around her navel.

Kali and her lover Bhairava ate human flesh. In a great encounter a sage Gosain trapped the Goddess in an underwater cave. Outside the cave he erected her statue to appease her. But Bhairava would not relent and in the bargaining settled for one human life every year.. Since then, one devotee of Bhairava was hurled from the top of the crag to the rocks below. The stone from where they fell was called Birkhala— 'The Hero's Step' and the rock below was known as 'Bhairava's Rock'.

Yes, I remembered it all. Every year, for three years I returned— praying for a child, painted swastiks on the temple wall, cried, offered gifts, tied sacred strings on limbs of every stone god I saw. But I knew I was cursed. I knew my life would be wasted...that I was a woman with no power to give life. I left Khandwa, my husband and my home and lived in Mandhata. I worshipped Kali and Bhairava. They knew me well, the devotees. We made a pact.

The days and weeks and months passed, I waited for the day of deliverance. During this wait, I met a holy man, Mithia. He was a gentle person. I had often seen him alone under a peepal tree, praying, outside the marketplace. One day, sitting on a rock, overlooking the Narmada, he approached me. "You will not find peace there in the waters below," he said. "Peace is here he tapped his chest. "And you cannot run away from it. It is here. Inside you. We spend all our lives searching the world for it, never realising that we carry it within us. It is here. Stop. Listen. Shut everything out. Listen, my child. Listen." He stopped speaking. The sound of the river receded. I felt myself sinking inwards. Almost drowning. I wanted to fight the sensation. I quickly opened my eyes. He sat near me with a benign smile on his face. "Come," he said, almost in a whisper, "come to my hut."

I got up and followed him. In the corner of his hut he spread out a mat. "Sleep now. Sleep. Don't be afraid. Lie down. I will pray over you." I lay down and closed my eyes. He lit a stick of incense and curling the smoke over my body, stuck it into a small holder. "Sleep. I will pray for you."

I do not know how long I slept. It was a blank, relaxed sleep. Then a sensation began spreading along my body. It was as if a breeze was playing on my skin. Up from my ankles, along my body. I involuntarily turned over on my stomach. It continued. I opened my eyes and turned over again. I was naked. He was blowing his breath on my skin. I closed my eyes again. My limbs were alive. I wanted to move but couldn't. I had been hypotised. I slept.

When I awoke, I was covered with a shawl. He had prepared tea and was sitting outside the hut sipping his mug of brew. We didn't speak. I rose, dressed and sat beside him.

"The day of the festival is drawing near," I said.

"I know," he replied.

"I have made a pact with the devotees of Bhairava."

"Nobody dies," he said, "we all go on and on...one experience after another. Till..." he became silent.

"The day of the festival is drawing near," I said again, "I have made a pact with the devotees of Bhairava. I will die, Mithia. I will be hurled from the crag and will break into little pieces on the rock below. Mithia, is this what my life means? This?"

"You decided this."

As the days passed, he prayed over me. Always in his hut.

Two days before the festival he said to me, "I will come to your hut at midnight. You understand? The devotees of Bhairava have already come to Mandhata. If they discover our connection, I will not be able to save you. We will have to leave Mandhata in the dark hours of the morning."

They speared him to death in my hut that night. I was taken to another hut closer to the Hero's Step.

The spokesman of the devotees was a man with a peculiar smile that stretched like elastic. His gentleness reeked of violence. Gaura, I think his name was that, kept me locked in the hut. A woman, Raida, was the only one permitted to visit me. She fed me, bathed me in milk, washed my hair with herbal juice and prayed over me.

And before the moment I was to go out, Gaura came into the hut. He was in a white dhoti. His body was bare. When he came closer I realised he had inhaled opium.

Putting out the lantern, he shut the door. I did not resist when he pulled me onto the mat.

A while later, I lay exhausted.

Raida bathed me again and dried me. Then she said, "Come, it is time. Bhairava is waiting."

Outside, a group of devotees waited. They began chanting. Their voices rose as I approached.

I stood before the Hero's Step. It was smeared red. Two coconuts were handed to me. I cracked them on the stone till they burst open. The liquid poured into the shell of a gourd. White flesh was dug out and added. Whatever coins I had were handed to the priestess—an old grey haired woman with a face like a skull. She produced a bowl with some liquid in it. Handed it to a boy standing near her. The boy sipped its contents and licked his lips. The bowl was given to me. The voices chanted louder as I drank.

I handed over all the remaining belongings I had. A small silver ring, my only earthly possession, was placed in my mouth. I rolled it over my tongue and then handed it to the priestess. She tossed it over the edge.

Soon the liquid I had drunk burned its way down into my stomach. My vision blurred. My body trembled. I cried. It was a sharp animal cry which wrenched its way out of my body. Then I began running.

I was airborne. My arms and legs swung in the air. The roar of the Narmada was loud in my ears.

III

Days passed in Mandhata, dream-filled. I wandered the sacred streets, among the ruins of the temples. I avoided Mr Gupta. And

Mithailal, he had disappeared. I was told that he had gone to Khandwa for a few days. His replacement, a gaunt old man, slept most of the time.

I had drifted between two lives. Wandering like a silk cotton tuft.

And every night, every night, I returned, pulled back the curtains and watched the hump of the pre-historic creature, the stone pillar and the dark sky burning with stars.

It almost seemed I was waiting. Waiting for the devotees. Waiting for the bath of milk, for the hair wash of herb juice, for the black force between my thighs, for the cracking of coconuts, for the burning drink for the woman with a skull face, for the last leap into space, for Bhairava.

As the first day of the festival drew near, I found it more and more difficult to walk. My body ached.

I bathed in milk that morning and wearing a white sari, crossed the bridge and followed the narrow path up the hill. By afternoon I was fifty yards away from the crag. In the shade of an old tree I sat down and dozed. At evening, a group of people arrived, they sat around the stone, smearing it red, chanting prayers. I didn't move, just watched them as they went about their familiar rituals. When it was dark I got up and walked towards them.

The group watched me as I approached. I stood in front of them.

"NO, no," someone shouted behind me. I turned. It was Mithailal. "No, you cannot." He pulled me by the arm and dragged me away.

Once at the Rest House, he opened my door and let me in. Then he shut the door behind him.

The wandering was over.

Seven months have passed since that meeting with Mithia. Here in Wembley, I sit at home most of the day, sometimes walking out in the evening. I do not go to the Institute anymore.

I am carrying Mithia's child. I am waiting—as all my life I have waited—for the moment when I see new life emerge.

IV

From The Diary Of Ajit Joshi

1st March

Shalini hasn't spoken to me. She seems to have withdrawn further into herself. She's been writing late into the night. I've tried to locate the sheaf of papers she's been working on but without luck. The doctor says to leave her to herself. She has to overcome her own problem. That's easy to say but what's going to happen to me? To our future?

Well, she can't have children. Neither of us can do anything about it. Adopt a child, I've told her over and over again. But she won't listen. I think she likes what she feels. Likes to hurt herself and hurt me. She seems to thrive on tension. Taut strings of nerves. She needs that to write. But we can't go on like this.

I worry like hell when I'm on tour because I keep wondering what she does with herself.

***

7th March

There were odd sounds last night from her room. I tried to open the door but it was locked. I listened. There was a murmur. It was her voice of course but with a peculiar accent. Not Indian at all. She seemed to be talking on a telephone. And there is no telephone in her room. She mentioned a name—someone called Mithailal.

I asked her this morning how she was feeling. She smiled at me. "Fine. Something wrong?" she asked.

"No," I replied, "nothing. Its just that I thought you had a disturbed night."

"Disturbed night? Why should I have a disturbed night?" she asked.

"Because you haven't been well."

"Who says so? I am well. Very well."

I came home from lunch and found her note on the table. "An old friend from Wembley is in Delhi. Have gone out for lunch."

I locked the front door then went into her room. Nothing unusual. All the same. Papers were scattered on her desk. Old manuscripts. I searched the drawers. Nothing. On my way to the cupboard something caught my eye—a half-torn strip of paper dangling out of the waste-bin. I picked it up. The last three letters of a word were visible—nby. On examining the contents of the bin I discovered the entire word—Caranby. It was like a signature. The handwriting distinctly Shalini's.

***

8th March

At breakfast this morning, Shalini spoke of her luncheon meeting with her friend Helen Caranby. "She's an Astro Physicist who lives in Wembley," she repeated. "Divorced, with a son. His name's Arjun. Its a long story" she added quickly when I showed interest in the name.

***

10th March

I found a manuscript this morning among her clothes. It is a story entitled "Return To Mandhata". Neatly typed and ready for despatch to a magazine.

Mandhata? Yes, I remember Mandhata. A brief holiday there.

And the Assistant Engineer and the printed extract he gave Shalini from the District Gazetteer of the region. But this Mithailal—who is he? Was he the man who was the sort of caretaker? Yes, perhaps. Infact so. He did go with Shalini as a guide when she went sight-seeing. Quite often too. What happened when I was away on survey work for a few days from Mandhata?

V

Ajit awoke that night. Fragrance of Jasmine in the room. He didn't put on the light but taking his torch, stumbled down the hallway to Shalini's room. Fumes of scented incense wafted out of the half-open door. A light was flickering inside.

He pushed the door and entered, almost choking. The room was lit with a lantern which stood on the table.

He watched Shalini get up from the bed, naked. She walked with her eyes staring blankly ahead of her—towards the window, she opened it, murmuring to herself. Ajit covered her gently with a light sheet and led her out of the room, her body trembled under his hands. Would she go beserk suddenly?

But in his room, he tied a sheet around her, making her immobile. Put her into his bed. Rang the doctor.

Returning to her side, he noticed she was herself again—"Am I going insane Ajit?—Tell me—Am I going insane?"

"No," he replied, "I understand."

VI

My dearest Ajit,

I don't know what has happened to me. Something's in my head and I can't get it out. Its a strange feeling. As if I don't belong to myself anymore. I know you are hurt. I know you are upset. Give me some time. I'll get better.

Shalini.

***

From The Diary Of Ajit Joshi

7th April

What am I to say? How does one respond to a letter of this sort? Keep quiet? Wait? Adopt. Adopt. That's what I've always said, adopt a child. But she won't listen. I'm going to have one, I'm going to have one, that's all she can say. Infantile uterus, that's what she has and she knows it. What the hell can I do? I can't concentrate on my work anymore. I've slowed down. I know she's ill. I know she needs time. But the pressure is too much on me. She's ashamed of herself so she's projecting herself into another person. Helen Caranby never existed. But now she does. She's alien. She's distant. I cannot reach her...but she's a part of my life.

Wrote to her sister. Got a letter from her. Says she wants to come down. Should be here soon.

Met Shal at the Nursing Home. She is half her size. Has lost so much weight.

VII

Maya rang the bell hard, twice. No one came to the door. She tried again. Still no reply. Then the shuffling of feet. Ajit opened the door. "Oh sorry, I caught you in the bath," she said breathlessly. Towel around his waist, he carried her suitcase in. "How's Shal doing?" she asked, following him.

"Fine. Needs rest. Will be okay."

She was struck by the cryptic reply. His letters had been passionately confused—almost frantic and painful. Ah, she thought, so like the man: calm exterior and inside—a furnace.

"You sleep in my room and I'll shift over to Shal's," he said quickly.

"Mind if its the other way around?" she grinned.

"Not at all."

"I'd prefer it that way."

Later, after dinner, they sprawled out on the rugs. Smoking. "Will she break the ice first or should I start?" he asked himself.

"Before we begin," she said, "I want to read the story." She pointed to the sheaf of papers lying near her.

"Go ahead." While she read, he poured her a drink and gave himself a stiff one. It burned down his throat. He felt good. Maybe I need a break afterall, he told himself, closing his eyes. But Maya had come at the wrong time. Perhaps she'd throw light on the crisis—but she'd also open up wounds. Wounds he didn't want to remember.

Bombay, their first meeting. No strings attached, she had said. Nothing whatsoever. He had agreed. Ofcourse, he soon found out that she couldn't manage it that way. Strings were necessary for Maya. Without them, she was adrift. And she couldn't bear that. So they got involved. Burning each other down to the bone. It was almost a disease.

But through the college years, something began changing in Maya. She grew rebellious. Dated frantically, took to hash and grass and began drifting away from Ajit. Shalini, her younger sister, was quieter, balanced, with an air of comfortable peace about her. Ajit confided in her. An innocent friendship matured and they married.

He shifted all this out of his mind. It was the past. He didn't want to keep digging it all up. It was difficult because there she was, sitting infront of him, sprawled infront of him, relaxed, friendly, smiling at him in that particular way—pleasantly high. He got up and began to pace the room.

"Sit down, will you," she said. "Why are you breaking up so easily?"

"I'm not breaking up," he replied, "just wondering."

"What?"

"Nothing. Stop prying," he replied brusquely.

"You haven't changed a little bit, "she said, affectionately tapping him with her foot on the ankle as he passed her.

"Time to crash," he said, and walked to his door, opened it, went in, closed it, a few minutes later opened it again. Maya was still sitting. "Is there anything you want?" She shook her head. "Anyway, if there is, just give me a call. I mean, knock on the door." She nodded. He closed the door. She waited for him to open the door again. And he did. "Oh, you're an early riser, can you get me up at seven?" She nodded. He shut the door again. The next time he opened the door, she was standing infront of him. He tried to open his mouth to say something but she walked into his room and shut the door behind her.

VIII

Its not easy when you are in your sisters shadow, particularly when she's two years younger than you, 'gentle, soft-spoken and considerate, talented, hardworking and consistent'. That's what everyone, starting from my parents, thought of Shalini. Nothing that I did or attempted to do'lived upto anyone's expectations'. It was always Shalini this and Shalini that. Shalini the artist. Shalini the budding writer. Shalini the excellent cook. Somehow everyone had the impression that I was big and fat enough to look after myself. Although I was not interested in marriage, it hurt me when Shalini would end up the focus of discussion.

Strangely, in comparison to my sister's 'quiet balanced good looks' I was physically very attractive, strong, full of kick... and yet Indian men would somehow find her more interesting. Typical of them. They couldn't take a woman who was strong and told them which bus to get on to and where to get off. They wanted someone nice and warm and accomodating. And if I freaked out in college it was precisely because I was fighting against Shalini's image. If she was angelic, I made sure I was the bitch angel.

I admit I was quite shaken when she got Ajit. The woman was painfully nice about it. I wanted her to be slick and fast and arrogant. But no, she was her 'balanced' self. Then they got married and moved away: Ajit the successful Engineer and Shalini the blossoming minor short story writer.

The confusion started when a child didn't arrive. God, what panic. They kept it quiet for some time but Aunt Radha opened her mouth one day. So that's the way the cookie crumbled. The talk about the perfect Indian woman dissolved. And instead they had on their hands a withdrawn and unpredictable person.

I remember the argument I once had with Ajit. It took place about the time when our relationship was at cracking point. "You're much too wild sometimes," he said irritated.

"I'm just too outspoken," I replied.

"Outspoken? I think you're rebellious. You'll do the opposite of whatever anyone expects from you."

"So you want me to be like Shalini. Correct. Balanced. Pure. Considerate."

"I'm not comparing you to Shalini," he interrupted.

"Not in so many words...but you *are* all the same. But let me tell you one thing, anyone who goes around with that holier than thou posture must be quite different inside. One day its all bound to come out."

I don't think I totally realised what I was saying at the time. How true I was.

The roles are reversed.

I have two months leave. I'm going to hang on here. Thank God I don't have a husband and family.

IX

Dearest Ma,

I'm home now and feeling much better. Maya is a great help. She really looks after me when Ajit is away. We're quite a happy family here.

In a week or so we are planning to go to Mandu for a holiday. Maya hasn't seen Mandu so I'm sure it'll be a welcome change. We've coaxed Ajit to take leave and he has managed to do that. Only the dates have to be fixed. Wish you could have been well enough to be here with us. Then there's Aunty Radha to look after also.

The head has gone from Delhi. Its much cooler, now that the rains have come.

Love to you and Aunty Radha,

Shal

***

Dear Maya,

I received a sweet letter from Shalini. She sounds much better now. And I must say, she is very happy that you are there with her. However, I think the two should be left alone. My suggestion is that either you stay back in Delhi or return to Bombay. Don't go with them to Mandu. My child, give them a chance to settle down again. Your little sister has not been well and they need time to sort their lives out. As much as Shalini loves you, she'll still find you a hindrance. And knowing her, she'll be too polite to say anything. If you love her, don't be an obstruction.

Your mother.

***

Maya dear,

I know you must have already received your mother's letter. I hope you will understand what she has suggested. They need to be by themselves. Afterall they *are* husband and wife.

Your mother is worrying herself sick. Ever since your father passed away, you two have been the centre of her life. Please have a little consideration for her.

By the way, the offer is still open from Sundar Shivdasani. He's a nice boy, Maya. He'll make a good husband. You do like him, don't you?

Listen, you're thirty. Only thirty! You're young. Your whole life is still ahead of you. Be reasonable.

Hoping to see you back soon in Bombay.

Lots of love and blessings.

Aunty Radha

From The Diary of Ajit Joshi

15th July

Mandu during the rains is beautiful. Magnificent ruins covered in moss and strung with creepers. Fine mist and silver showers of rain. Inspite of her condition, Shal has walked a great deal. She's been sketching a lot, writing a bit and keeping to herself. Maya and I have been together most of the time. We have no privacy here at all. Something should be worked out.

***

16th July

Where is all this leading to? Sometimes I feel ashamed of myself. Other times I can see Maya's point of view. But all the same it still hurts to see Shal sometimes walking among the ruins by herself, or sitting alone on a rock, sketching. The distance, the terrible distance. One day I went out in search of Shal. Found her spread out on a broken platform at the base of ruin. She was asleep. A helplessness overcame me. I sat down and watch her.

***

XI

Jottings By Shalini Joshi

***

Between

Between living and dying is the dream—
Rain of leaves
Shrouding the faces we have loved,
The land we have loved,
The past we have loved;
In the green-brown of forgetfulness
Where pools of rain
Smell of monsoons—
The earth waits;
We pause.
Between the birth of the first leaf
And the death of the last
Is the pain of change.

**

Hold

Hold on to hours, they are fruits of time,
Bite the flesh and spit the seeds out far,
The dark mud has its own familiar way,
It grows each seed into a lonely star.

You

You who stand on the border
Of this dream, wait for me;

The tree has no leaves,
Shade of a cloud shelters me;

I hold in my left hand
A photograph, torn letters;

Memory, unwanted skin,
Clings to me;

My unborn children fill the air
Like spring pollen—

Waiting for me to accept my life,
My undecidedness, my rebirth;

You who stand on the border of tomorrow,
Wait for me;

I am time's child,
Stop me from becoming another,
Teach me to be.

**

Evening Hour

Haunting light among the evening trees,
Flaming flowers in the violet shade,
Love was the afternoon, this is death,
A journey to the centre of the night
I have waited for this holy hour,
Leaving dreams wedged in the womb of lives;
Holding no hope, no faith, no certainties,
The silver cord floating away in the breeze.

***

After

After the rain of your touches—
Dawn crawled over the garden wall
Licking my body dry
And the first bird broke from a neem
And cried—
A strange shrill cry
That refused to scatter—
That held together like a stone,
Spinning across the open blue.

I am waiting—
The stone will come home one day
And lie amongst the unkempt grass
And the overgrown trees

And weed-filled house
Smelling of bats and night.

***

XII

Shalini stumbled upon them whilst she was wandering alone among the weed-filled out-houses of the fort. She watched the half naked body of her sister rocking slowly, her head lolling back, hair spread across the mat on the grass. She was saying something in gentle rhythms, almost prayer-like. Ajit's mute body clung to her like a weed. A faint trail of mist slipped over the ruins.

She sat down quietly. Dropped her face in her hands. Her mind blank.

Time. No consequence.

Later, they found her in the same position. Her face pale.

"How long have you been here?" Maya asked in almost a whisper.

"All the while. All the while,'' she replied distantly. "I saw you, if that's what you want to know.''

That evening, no one spoke.

Over dinner. "Listen," said Maya "why don't you say something. Shout, yell, abuse, anything. Say something. I can't stand it. I can't stand the mask that I see. Take it off."

Shalini didn't reply. She kept eating.

"Can't you react to what I am saying?"

"There is no need," she replied. "It won't change anything I don't want to hurt you.

"Hurt me? Hurt me? I don't like what you are saying. You and your superior air. Outside, the mask. Inside Mandhata. The madness..."

"Stop it Maya," snapped Ajit.

"Oh you shut up, I'm talking to her. Listen here Shal, I want to know which one of your personalities is talking. I want Mandhata to talk, you hear me?" She banged her fist into the plate, food scattered across the table. "I want you and your tantric to talk. Speak. I want to hear you out."

Shalini stood up. Her lips were trembling. "You want to prove that you've won, is it? Okay, you've won. You're a better person. Is that what you want to hear? Now get out of my life. Don't haunt me anymore." She went back to the room and began packing her things.

Neither of them believed that she would leave. Maya thought and hoped for a reunion, a cementing. Ajit was too shell-shocked to come to any conclusions. But she left.

XIII

Shalini wasn't at home when they reached Delhi, neither had she gone to Bombay said her mother on the phone. Maya left for Bombay with the hope of finding her at some friend's place. The police were alerted.

The only place she could have gone to was Mandhata, it struck Ajit. He hurriedly began packing a suitcase.

The telephone rang.

"Ajit?" It was Shalini.

"Where have you been?" he didn't wait for her to answer. "God, what a relief. I'm happy, I'm so happy. How are you? Where are you speaking from?"

"New Delhi Railway Station. I'm standing near the Enquiry Counter...." He didn't wait for her to finish the sentence. Already on his way down the staircase.

XIV

Ajit watched her lying on the bed, sobbing into the pillow. He didn't know what to do so he sat down at the foot of the bed. She raised her crumpled face from the pillow, "I'm sorry. I'm awefully sorry. I let you down. I hurt you. I made you feel inadequate....when all along it was I who was inadequate."

"No Shal, I don't think I'm special in any way. I don't think I'm special enough for your caring. I'm an ordinary man with ordinary feelings, maybe you invested too much in me."

She wasn't listening to him. "I swear, nothing happened in Mandhata. I was just lonely and empty and hopeless. Ajit, it was all in my head. I think it was all in my head. Don't go away. Don't ever go away."

"Maybe I'm not good enough Shal. Maybe I'm not worth it."

"I care a damn. Come here. Come."

He got up and walked to her side. Lay down near her.

"Ajit. Lets have a child," she said quietly. "Adopt a child."

"Yes," he said reassuringly, "yes, of course."

The Witch

Shrawan Kumar

I carry a gash on my mind. It does not bleed, but it hurts all the same. It has been there for all these years. No, it won,t go.

Do I need to turn it all over again? It is no use, especially when I have come to the end of my life. Maybe, I will live for another year or so. It is a shattered body that I have. It does not have much substance in it now. In any case what is there in a body? It is all air. The moment this air passes out, it is all over. The body then lies stiff as a plank. It is this air that you may like to call the life force. How thinly a man lives! He struts and shows off. But isn't it the Almighty, who makes man strut? Man dances to his tune as long He wants to. He knows when to pull the string. Man walks only on a predestined course. It's He who determines this course. He inscribes it on the forehead of man. He has taught some men to read this inscription. But only a few know it, whom He wills. Even the scientists are beaten at their game. They unravel one mystery, only to be confronted with another. As if there is a cave within a cave!

What was it I read in the newspaper the other day? Oh, my eyes! They don't help me much. I thought I would get them set right. But it seems this cataract will outlive me. It isn't that I cannot make out between one thing and another. I can somehow pick out words. Now, don't these newspapers carry funny stories? Some of them are quite juicy. But they don't sound true. The headlines are no less tricky. There was also a film with the title 'Headlines'. God, these journalists! Devils they are some of them! They stir up things and then write about them. This is what is called sensationalising. What an incredible bit of news there was in the paper the other day! Only if I could lay my hand on a paper everyday! It is only on a holiday that I can borrow it from the neighbours. But I don't get it for the asking. They give it if they are through with it. How tartly Neetu's Daddy remarked one day: "Strange, her son is doing so well! Can't he buy a newspaper for her?"

Really, it gave me a severe jolt. But I absorbed it. He was not to be blamed. How could he spare his paper when he was in the profession?

They never refuse other things. Behave like family members. But a family is a family. How good it would be if a newspaper was bought for me in the family itself! Will it make a lot of difference? Another fifteen-twenty rupees? Perhaps they do not want to spend exclusively on me. Of what consequence am I to them? Suren has no time for a newspaper in the morning. He is always in a hurry to catch up with things in his job. As for his wife, she has no inclination for reading, a post-graduate though she is. She avoids anything that requires a degree of sensibility. The radio suffices for her. Or a film on the VCR on an alternate day. Suren brought this VCR from London. He always brings something or the other whenever he goes abroad. A variety of things are there in the house, but what have I to do with them. Take your two meals and stay out. Isn't that enough? Just utter a word and start a riot. It was hell every time I said something. I gave it up. Why should I bother? Anything could lead to a mother-in-law versus daughter-in-law squable. There are already a number of such stories around. Now what harm can I, an old hag, do her? Enough that my days pass on.

She is at it again, grumbling and grousing. How does it concern her if bored by sheer idleness I deglued a paper bag and straightened out the sheets to read them at ease? One has to pass time somehow. For how long can you sit idle or lurk around? If I wish to watch a T.V. programme to pass some time, pat comes her remark: "You know how high the electricity bill goes!" or "Mataji, TV repair is exorbitant these days!"

If they watch TV themselves, it would not need repairs, but if I watch it, it would get damaged. What a plea! As if my eyes are drills. As if they would pierce the screen through. And to know that there are two TV sets in the house, one colour and the other black and white. How will it matter if the black and white is placed in my room? The neighbours snigger when I go to their apartment to watch a programme. The TV at home will be put on only when Suren is in. So is it with the VCR. Otherwise it remains shut. Surely, this old age is a great curse. Mother I am, no doubt, but in name only. No rights to anything. No claim on the son even. You are thirsty amidst oceans of water. If they remained issueless, am I to blame for it? She had every possible treatment. Dear, if you aren't destined to have a child of your own, better adopt one. If not from among your husband's kin, then from among your own. But what I cherish is happiness in the house. It's weepy faces that I don't like. If I were to reel off my grouses, there would be no end to them. You can have a grouse on any count. The creation of Pakistan itself will be enough reason to grouse for a life-time, though it is forty years since it came into being. Each man has his devil and saint. The devil has no value without his counterpart, the saint. Devils are always out to destroy. But if the destroyer is mighty, the saviour is mightier. Hundreds of women jumped into wells to escape outrage. Many died, but I survived. God knows how. But when I opened my eyes, I found myself in a refugee camp. I was carrying Suren then. Suren's father was sitting by me. "Don't you worry, Bachno, don't worry a bit," he consolded. "God is great!"

God is really great. You can always be aware of His power if you wish to. Again and again He keeps alerting man to His power, but man ignores it. Man doesn't desist from his evil ways. God tolerates it all, but when it crosses the limit, He has to act. Even the slightest movement of His finishes off thousands and lakhs. But even amidst this vast destruction, He saves whomsoever He wants to. Oh God, You are beyond man's intelligence! Even the wisest can't unravel Your mystery.

Suren was born in a refugee camp. I had just turned thirty. I was the second wife. Suren's father was around fifty. The children of the first wife were grown up and earning. They were almost my age. But they were separated in the confusion of the exodus. Our marriage was the outcome of the circumstances in which we found ourselves. I was dark and carried pock marks on my face. He was of an age when no one would marry his young and good-looking daughter to him. He was not rich either. But once I was married to him, he never gave me an occasion to complain. A nice man. Suren was now growing. Really, they were hellish days. Pakistan left its scar in many ways. Suren's father felt broken, his energy drained off. He was growing into a skeleton. And there was one ailment after another. Suren himself was so skinny. I prayed for him all the time. I wanted him to grow up quickly to bring some relief to our wretched lives.

Yes, things did change for the better. The lost children were reunited with us. Also, Suren got a small job. He continued his studies nevertheless. Suren's father grew older and weaker. I feared for his life all the time. And it did happen. One day he shut his eyes and never opened them again. I expected it, but still I was stunned. I was petrified. I sat still like a stone for four days. My eyes were dry and blank. No tears. One weeps for much less tragic events. Sometimes someone's generosity or affection moves one deeply. But what happened to me then. I have not been able to make out till today. Doctors said I was in a severe trauma. Trauma? What trauma? Hadn't I prepared myself for the event coldly?

The elder children did not live with us, but they were a support. They had their own households now. The eldest one was not a grandfather. The younger daughter was looking for a match for her son. We had eaten away all that we could bring with us from Pakistan. We wholly depended on Suren's earnings. Suren was no longer the skinny chap that he was. He was now filled out and looked a full man.

How happy I was when a proposal came for Suren! Suren disdained the idea of a dowry. Why should I bother my head about it if he did not want it? He had an ideal before him. He wanted an ideal marriage. Do have an ideal marriage, son. I would be the last one to come in your way. He wanted his bride to join him just in the clothes she was wearing. Yes, she walked in in just the clothes she was wearing. Suren was very happy. He had, as it were, found his other half. All the time, he would keep the door of his room bolted from inside. I felt like laughing, though I also felt distressed. Doesn't it occur to you, son, that your mother remained shut out and lonesome? Anyway, may God bless you! May He bless your wife with a son! May He bless you with all-round prosperity! It should be a happy home. That's all I want.

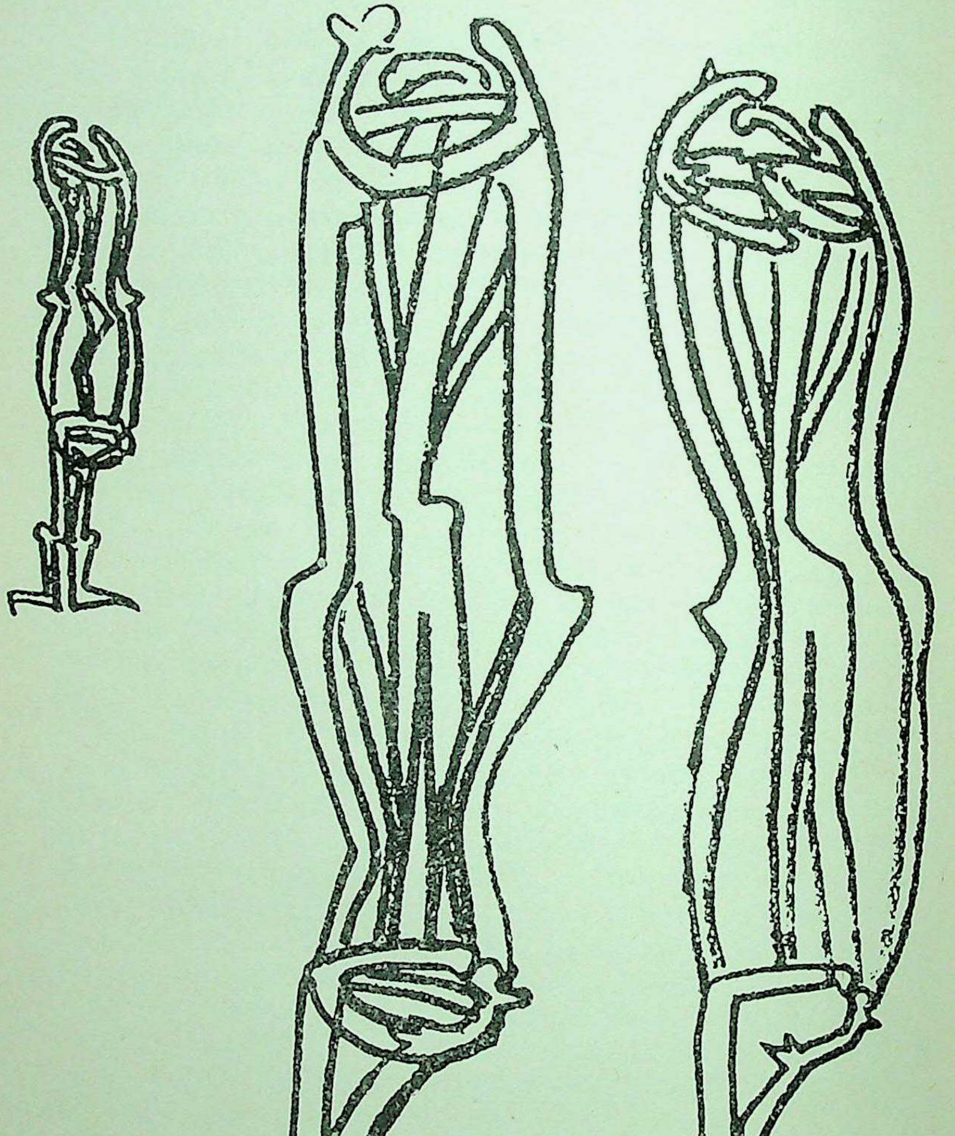
But four years passed. She did not conceive. At first I thought they must be planning their family—they, after all, belong to modern times! But then I realised that it was not so. She was just helpless. If she could help it, she would have liked to have a child long back...But strangely, she could not now stand the sight of me. She also showed scant regard for Suren. She would often nag him. One day she shouted at him. "Do you think things would go all right with this dark witch in the house? Everything will get blighted!"

God, what's this? Such venom! I know you. You shower manna when You want. Then why this venom for me? I felt lacerated all over. There were stabs of pain inside. I thought of Suren's father who left me midstream. But things may not have been different for him either if he were alive today. Yes, but we could have lived together in another apartment. Now if I go to the elder children, it may bring a bad name to Suren. Tongues will wag. But I was not educated enough to get a job. At best, I could be an ayah! Still God is merciful. If Suren were completely under his wife's thumb, he would have by now thrown me out. Once when his wife was very censorious, he immediately shouted her down, "Do you mean I should throw her down the rooftop! Remember, she is my mother!"

Mother! What expectations one nourishes from one's children! I often told myself that I should have no expectation or aspiration as it was this that led to grief. Better forsake all and seek asylum in an *ashram*. People at my age have no business to hang on. Our scriptures tell us of four stages in life. One should abide by them. I have already lived three. I must now get ready for the fourth, the *Sanyas*. That's the way to God. You have to go up the ladder, step by step. A step a day will take you to the last one. But the last step is the most difficult one. You cannot get on to it without the help of the *Satguru*. There are still many humps to go over. There are also sandy plains, stretching far and wide. There are rivers and oceans. There are high- rise mountains and then finally that kindly Light. That Light is God. Oh God I need it.

How satisfying that Suren earns well. Everything is in plenty in the house. He will buy a car soon. Who knows in what mood his wife was when she told me the other day, "Congratulations, Mataji, we are going in for a car!"

Do buy a car, son. May He give you a long life and a lot more happiness. If only you shared a bit of your happiness with me! Maybe, I am a dark witch. Maybe, your wife is right. But do remember that a witch, too, spares her own people.


Bhagat -53

The Scarecrow

Surendra Prakash

Hori, the protagonist of Premchand's novel, had grown quite old. His eyelashes and eyebrows had turned gray and his back had bent double. His hands had become gnarled and veins stood on their backs like rope-like thick flesh.

He had fathered two sons both of them now dead. One of them was drowned in the Ganga while bathing and the other was killed in a police encounter. There is no point in telling why he fell out with the police. When a youngman becomes conscious of himself and starts feeling that he is a somebody and looks askance at the inequities of life, not of his making, it is not surprising if he falls foul of the long arm of the law. Something similar happened with Hori's son. Hori's grip over the handle of his plough suddenly relaxed. His hands shook and then his hold over the plough tightened. Prodding the bullocks to move on, he dug the plough into the earth and it plunged forward, tearing through the heart of the earth.

The sons had left behind wives and five children, three belonging to the one who was drowned in the Ganga and two to the younger one who had died at the hands of the police. Now the burden of bringing up the children had squarely fallen on Hori's old shoulders. The very thought of it had made blood course rapidly in his decrepit body.

That morning though the sun had not yet risen yet the sky was redder than usual. Hori's five grandchildren were sitting near the well in their courtyard, taking their bath. Hori's elder daughter-in-law was pulling out bucketsfull of water from the well and pouring them over their naked bodies. They jumped with joy as the water fell over their bodies and noisily rubbed them, splashing the pouring water around. The younger daughter-in-law was making chapatis, throwing them in a wire basket, as they came off the iron plate. After changing his clothes, Hori was tying the turban over his head. The job done, he looked at his face in the small mirror resting in the alcove. The face looked so lined and wrinkled. Joining his palms together, he closed his eyes and bowed his head before the picture of Hanuman, hanging by the side of the mirror. Then he passed through the door and came into the courtyard.

"Are all of you ready?" he asked in a loud voice.

"Yes, Bapu," all the children replied together.

The women adjusted their *pallus* over their heads and their hands started working faster. Hori looked around. Nobody was ready. They had been trying to fib him, as he could see. How necessary it was to tell lies to get on in life, he thought. If God had not bestowed upon man the boon of telling lies, people would have died right and left in great multitudes. They would have been shorn of the plea to live. First men told lies and then they tried to prolong their lives just to give the lies a semblance of truth.

To prove the point, just now Hori's daughter-in-law and his grandchildren were engaged, heart and soul, in converting a falsehood, uttered only a moment ago, into truth. However, by the time Hori had collected his farm implements from a corner they were ready to accompany him.

Hori's land was in full bloom. The crop had ripened and was ready to be cut. It was like a festive day for Hori and his family. They were eager to reach their field with the least delay and get down to work. In their hurry they imagined as if the sun's rays had gilded their house. It was like a touch of magic.

Feeling elated, Hori put his *angocha* (long all-purpose towel-like clothpiece) on his shoulder. Surely, he was in for good times. The petty government functionary would not be a threat to him any more, nor would he fear the village money-lender. He had no share to surrender to the zamindar nor would he reel under the high-handedness of the British ruler.

He had only an eye for the green stalks swaying and dancing in his field.

"Let's go, Baba!" Hori's eldest grandson caught his finger. The other children clung to his legs. The younger daughter-in-law placed the bundle of food upon her head and the elder daughter-in-law locked the door.

Intoning Beer Bajrangi's name they passed through the outer door of the courtyard and came into the lane. Turning to the left, they took the path to their field.

The village lanes were astir. People were going to or coming back from their fields. They were happy. The crops were full and rich, making their eyes shine with happiness. Hori felt life today was different from yesterday. He looked over his shoulder at his children. His spell broke. They very much looked like a peasant's children—sallow, puny, who got scared at the sound of a jeep or the stirring of a leaf. His daughters-in-law were also cast in the mould of a peasant woman, rendered a widow.

Their faces were hidden behind veils and poverty, like lice, crawling under every fold of their clothes.

Hori slowly trudged on with bowed head. Past the last house of the village, the open fields began. The watering wheel was standing silent and a pariah dog lay asleep under a neem tree. In the distance, some buffaloes, bullocks and cows stood contentedly snorting after chewing the cud. The golden and green fields swayed far into the distance. Where these fields ended began Hori's field, small isolated and lonely, marked from others by a small brook. The crop in it was yawning expectantly, waiting to be cut.

Walking along the narrow bridle paths between the fields, Hori and his party looked like small coloured insects crawling over withered grass. They were headed for their field beyond which lay a vast stretch of arid land devoid of any greenery. There were only some sandy earth in which the foot sank as one stepped on it. It was brittle and grainy, reminding Hori of the charred bones of his sons picked up from the funeral pyre which crumbled and disintegrated at a mere touch. The wasteland seemed to be advancing. Hori recalled that within the last fifty years it had advanced the width of two hands. He however hoped that his own field would be spared from being engulfed till his own children grew up. But would it really matter because by then he would have himself been reduced to earth and most probably become a part of the wasteland.

A maze of bridle paths one merging into the other and the unshod feet of the members of his family which had kept trudging on these paths since ages. The sun was peeping at the goings-on below through its eastern aperture.

With ceaseless walking their feet were covered with thick layers of dust. In the fields around them people were busy cutting the crops. They would throw a perfunctory 'Ram, Ram' at the passers-by and then with renewed vigour swing their scythes through the stems of the plants.

One by one, Hori and the children jumped over the brook. There was hardly any water at the bed of the brook. The sandy earth had completely dried up and the receding water had left ghoulish footmarks on the sand. But as they looked ahead of them and saw their green field swaying in the breeze their hearts brimmed over with happiness. After harvesting the crop their courtyard would be filled with fodder and their granary with rich, life-giving food grain. Ensconced on their cots, they would enjoy a leisurely meal of rice and belch with satisfaction. Perhaps the same thought was running through the other's minds.

Suddenly Hori stopped in his tracks. The others also stopped behind him. Hori seemed to be astounded at what he saw from a distance in his field. The others were also looking now at Hori and then at the field, surprise writ large on their faces. Hori stirred as if galvanized. Walking a few steps he shouted at the top of his voice, "Who's there?"

Something rustled through the standing crop, akin to a faint restless stirring. Hori broke into a run, the others who made the rear, trying to keep pace with him.

"Who are you? Why don't you speak?" Hori cried again. "Why are you cutting this crop? It's mine."

But no reply came from the field. They had now come near the field and could distinctly hear the swishing sound of a scythe cutting through the crop at the other end of the field. A vague fear clutched their hearts.

"Who are you, you bastard?" Hori cried again, mustering courage. "Why don't you speak?" He threateningly waved his scythe in the direction of his field.

Suddenly a skeleton-like thing rose to view at the other end of the field. A faint smile appeared on its face as it stood there gazing at them.

Then they heard its voice, "It's I, Hori Kaka—the Scarecrow!" It waved its scythe in the air.

They all emitted a stifled cry and their faces turned pale. A white scum had formed on Hori's lips. For sometime they stood in a daze. They seemed to have lost count of time. It could be an instant, an age, even an ion. Till they heard Hori's voice, they were not even aware whether they were alive or dead.

"You, Scarecrow, you! *Arre*, I had fabricated you for the protection of my crops. I had put together bamboo sticks and had attired you in that English hunter's clothes—the same English hunter for whom my father used to raise the hunting cry to scare the quarry out of its hiding for him to make his kill. Pleased with my father the hunter had given him his discarded English clothes. Your face was made with the discarded clay pot lying in my house. I had put the Saheb's hat over the pot which formed your head. You, lifeless bamboo frame, how dare you cut my crop?"

Hori cautiously advanced while speaking, but the Scarecrow kept smiling as if Hori's hectoring tone had failed to create any impression on it. As Hori stalked nearer he found that the Scarecrow had already cut down one-fourth of his crop. It was standing over the cut crop, scythe in hand and smiling. It was a big surprise how did the Scarecrow come by the scythe? They had been seeing it for the past many months. The lifeless Scarecrow always stood in the field empty-handed. But today it had the likeness of a man—a man made of flesh and blood.

Its sight almost drove Hori mad. Stepping forward, he gave the Scarecrow a violent push. But the Scarecrow did not budge from its place. On the other hand the push seemed to have recoiled against Hori and he fell at some distance from the Scarecrow. The boys shrieked and rushed towards their grand father who had placed his hands over his back and was trying to rise on his feet. They helped him to stand up. He gave the Scarecrow a frightened look.

"So you have become stronger than me, Scarecrow? You, whom I've improvised with my own hands. For the sole purpose of guarding my crop."

The Scarecrow kept smiling. "Hori Kaka, there is no point in getting angry with me," it said at last. "I've cut my rightful share of the crop and no more. One-fourths of it, to be precise."

"But what right have you to usurp my children's share? Who are you to take away my produce?"

"I've a right to it, Hori Kaka. For the simple reason that I exist, that I'm here. I've all along kept vigil over your field."

"But I had installed you here thinking that you are devoid of life. And lifeless thing has no rights, no claims. But how did you contrive to get this scythe of yours? Where did you get it from?"

The Scarecrow gave loud laugh. "Hori Kaka, you are very naive, a very simple man. You are talking to me all right and yet you say that I am devoid of life."

"But who gave you this scythe and this life? Not I, I'm sure."

"No, I got them on my own, just like that. The day you slashed the bamboo pole in order to improvise my frame and brought the Englishman's rotten clothes to attire me and sketched my eyes, nose, mouth and ears on that discarded clay pot of yours—on that very day life had started struggling to break out through the sum total of these ingredients. I'm the sum and substance of the ingredients assembled by you in giving me shape. I stood here patiently waiting for the crop to ripen. The scythe also gradually emerged out of my being. When the crop was ripe the scythe had taken tangible shape and I found myself holding it. But I have not played foul with you in any manner; you can't charge me with dishonesty. I just kept waiting for this day. Today when you came to gather your crop I cut my share of it. There's nothing to be angry about."

The Scarecrow spelled out the whole thing in a slow, deliberate tone so that it may unerringly sink into his hearer's minds.

"No, this will not be allowed to happen. It's a big conspiracy against me. I don't take you to be alive. No, it's nothing but some sort of illusion. I'll call the panchayat and seek justice from it. You throw away that scythe of yours. I'll not allow you to take away even a blade of grass from here," Hori raved and the Scarecrow smilingly threw away the scythe.

The panchayat held its session at the village *chopal*. The *panches* and the head *panch* all were present. Hori was sitting there, surrounded by his grandchildren. His face had wilted with worry. His two daughters-in-law were standing among other women. The *panchayat* had to pronounce its verdict today. The contending parties had already made their submissions before the *panchayat*.

At last the Scarecrow heaved into sight. He was slowly proceeding towards the gathering. They all looked in his direction. He was smiling as before. As he entered the *chopal*, they all stood up unknowingly and bowed their heads. Hori was outraged at this turn of events. He felt as if the Scarecrow had mortgaged the conscience of the entire village. He suspected he had also bought the judges to make them swing the decision in his favour. He felt helpless as if he was wallowing in swiftly flowing water.

At last the head panch pronounced the judgment. Hori shook to the very core of his being. Abiding by the *panchayat's* decision he agreed to part with one-fourth of the crop in favour of the Scarecrow. Then he stood up and addressed his grandchildren:

"Listen carefuly," he said, "Perhaps this is the last crop of our lives that we are going to reap. The wasteland is still at some distance from our field. It's my sincere advice that in future never install a scarecrow for the protection of your crops. Next year when the land is ploughed and the seed is cast into it and the nectar of rain gives birth to tender saplings then tie me against a bamboo pole and install me in your field in place of the scarecrow. I'll protect your crop till the day the wasteland creeps forward and devours our field, rendering it sandy and unproductive. Don't remove me from there till that eventuality overtakes you. Let me stay for good as a warning to people that they should know that a scarecrow is not lifeless. It gets life on its own and something in his being places a scythe in his hand, giving him the right to claim one-fourth of the crop."

His harangue finished, Hori slowly proceeded towards his field, his grandchildren in tow and his daughters-in-law some steps behind them. The village people who made up the rear were walking with bowed heads.

As Hori reached his field, he fell down and died. His grandchildren proceeded to tie him against a bamboo pole while the others stood there watching this strange spectacle. The scarecrow took off his hat and holding it against his head bowed his head.

Translated from Urdu by Jai Ratan

BOOK REVIEWS

Arjun: Sunil Gangopadhyay; Penguin India Ltd;
Printed pages 205; 1988; Rs. 50

In its basic outline, this book is based on the main story of the epic Mahabharata. Even the name of the protagonist in the novel, Arjun, is the same as that of one of the characters in the epic. The Mahabharata tells the story of the five Pandava princes who being fatherless are cheated of their rightful inheritance by their wicked and powerful cousins the Kauravas. After years of hardship, many escapes from death and several attempts at peaceful negotiations for their share of the kingdom, the Pandavas finally meet the Kauravas in war, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Their greatest asset is the friendship of Arjun and Krishna regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu. It is because of this friendship that Krishna agrees to drive Arjun's chariot in battle for him.

However, when Arjun comes on to the battlefield and sees his own cousins as well as many former friends and relatives arrayed in battle against him, he is totally shaken. A revulsion, infinite sadness fills him at the thought of slaughtering his own people. He drops his weapons and refuses to fight.

That is when Krishna speaks to him about duty as a warrior and explains to him the philosophy of life (which later became known as the Bhagavad Gita). Finally Arjun realizes that he must sacrifice personal feelings of attachment and fight a just cause. And so, after great acts of individual heroism on both sides, tha battle of Kurukshetra does end in victory for Arjun and his brothers, a victory of good over evil.

In a novel about the struggle for survival in the 20th century the latter day Arjun does find his destiny in a way similar to his namesake in the epic. He is a refugee from East Bengal but educated and hardworking as he is, he is saved from the poverty-stricken existence of his fellow refugees. However, Arjun Raychoudhury soon discovers that he can no longer distance himself from their problems when he finds his community allaying themselves with crooked land-owners. Arjun then discovers that he has to make a hard choice—whether to confront his enemies or run. The modern day Arjun decides to fight his way out of the crisis that threatens to destroy him and everything he holds dear.

This simple well written book will hold the interest of the reader from the first page to the last.

Goan Vignettes and other poems: Ashok Mahajan; Oxford University Press, Printed Pages 64; 1986; Rs. 25/-

When Ashok Mahajan opens his Goan Vignettes and other Poems with

Tourist note
Fresco-amber
In Ajanta art.
I Knos this pigment from
Pools of bovine piss
At any vegetable mart.

(Culture)

you know at once that this is a man who probably loves this country, this India, her sights and smells, fair and foul, entire. Therefore, when he speaks, he does so with an air of amiability that dominates all other nuances in this collection of poems. And there are several nuances—there is humour, there is irony, there is tenderness, there is whimsy...

Mahajan spins a whole host of images. They people the thirty-odd poems presented in two sections—Eclectic Sketches and Goan Vignettes. They are vivid, they are immediate, they make you exclaim: Oh god, I know...Take, for instance, these lines:

A girl runs behind a cow
And gathers its fresh droppings in a pail

(Chamoli Village)

Or take these lines: about a grandmother who:

In between prayers
Hurls invective
At the sweeper in the courtyard
Who scrimshanks with his broom;
....

The pantheon impassive, quite
Oblivious of offence.
(Grandmother)

What does 'scrimshanks' mean, you ask, and then pass on to the next poem.

At other times, the writer is evocative. These lines about a truck driver are particularly perceptive

At night the truck runs
More on the hooch in his system
Than on the gas in its tank.
(Truck Driver)

recalling long, dark nights of endless roads and roaming far from home.

After having knocked you over with 'caudices cicatriced by climbers', he takes you to the one sensual moment in his landscaping:

Fifty to sixty
They stand in a line
Like bevies of tall
And svelte college girls
Gregarious and giggling

On the campus, with breasts
Of tender coconuts, waywardly
Waving their fronds
Of hair and whispering
Gossip to the winds.
(Groves of Coconuts near Benaulim)

There is no doubt. The first reading of these poems makes a terrific impact. As we pass into the Goan interlude, there is also a shift in tone, a change in the atmosphere. There is an aura of song and small town chatter. The poems are indeed, sketches. The book is aptly titled. They are highly descriptive, often volatile and almost always gently humourous. In Goa, Mahajan becomes quite audacious. Tongue-in-cheek, he speaks of

Miss Veronica Dias
(who) Was crowned Princess
At the October dance
Of Majorda Jaycees.

(Majorda Jaycees Princess)

and the aunt whose

…cottage stands in Inez square
She looks like one of your maiden aunts
But talk to her and you're aware
She has a horticultural air…

(The Horticultural Aunt)

Sandwiched between the two women lies the dream of many young boys and Joe d'Silva:

A comb then he took out from hip-pocket
and started combing back his hair
'My dream,' he said, 'but you may mock it'
'My dream is to be a Dempo player!'

(Soccer Player)

Again and again this thought strikes the reader—this is no poet of wild imaginings. This is a painter of life as it flickers, flames and sometimes fades about him. He speaks of river and rain, a wedding and Vasco da Gama and the inevitable hippie, this time a Frenchman, La Fontaine: who tells Peter Saldana:

'Yes, my love for Goa is intense',
Drawled this Frenchman from Provence.
'There's plenty of scope
For drug and dope.
And for contraband the field is immense.'

'But summer is here again.
Viola! I must catch the train
Stacked with a haul
Of hash for Nepal.
Shall be back in Goa after the rain.'

(To Goa With Love)

Jogging along on these verses, one is forced to apply the brakes and

गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय हरिद्वार
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ponder on the vicissitudes of fascioles of clouds, tourists inestaminets, tangles of saxicolous shrubs and semipiternal yamns…and then jog on, a little nonplussed, regardless.

Goan Vignettes…may not be great poetry, but it is quaint observation. While the words do not stick, the images are reinforced each time you meet the people Mahajan seems to have met, the places he seems to have seen.

And to get a real taste of the flavour of these sketches, you, too, must love this country, this India, just that little bit more.

The Enigma of Arrival: V.S. Naipaul; Viking; Printed Pages 318; 1987; $8.95

Anyone who has known V.S. Naipaul's writing, has exulted in his mastery of language, or deplored his too-easy acceptance of absolutes, including absolute pessimism on India, has tended to think of him predominantly for his homelessness. This is a concept that has followed him round the world and was with him, ironically, even when he wrote *A House For Mr. Biswas*.

It has evoked in us, whether friend or foe to Naipaul, a certain sympathy, a certain sadness, for men such as he seem to deserve happiness for the long way they have come from colonial have-not to sophisticated commentator on the world's civilisations.

But now Mr. Naipaul has found a home and writes what he calls a novel (in five sections) to celebrate the enigma of his homecoming. A novel? Hardly, because the book is about a writer in his mid-50s, an Indian and a Hindu, born in Trinidad, educated at Oxford, who has travelled extensively and lived most of his adult life in England. This person is indistinguishable from V.S. Naipaul, has his tone of voice, his personality, his unusual gift for writing. The book is in fact a thinly-veiled autobiography, and if it doesn't follow the more pedestrian form with the clock for master, this is a matter of Naipaul's style. So be it.

Enigma tells the story of the passage of ten years, during which the writer lives in a cottage on the grounds of a Victorian-Edwardian manor in a Wiltshire valley within easy walking distance of Stonehenge and Salisbury Plain. Naipaul thinks occasionally about the first 18 years of his life in Trinidad "my insecure past" and the scholarship that brought him to Oxford and England, "the other man's country." He says little of the long struggle to become the mature writer he now is. But what does engage him is his sojourn in England, rural England, "this gift of the second life in Wiltshire, the second, happier childhood… the second arrival…at a knowledge of natural things, together with a fulfilment of the child's dream of the safe house in the wood."

The beauty of Wiltshire is not to be denied, E.M. Forster (and earlier

Hardy), described it to perfection. And Naipaul, very much his own man and writer, refers to: "The beauty of the place, the great love I had grown to feel for it, greater than for any other place I had known." Nevertheless he remains an alien, racially distinct from Englishmen, a former colonial. "Fifty years ago there would have been no room for me on the estate, even now my presence was a little unlikely."

But by itself this would not make a book or a "novel" of 318 pages. Much of these pages is in the nature of leisurely self-explanation. There are other people in the reflection, but no character save that of the narrator is developed with any depth. There are glancing references to a neighbour, who befriends the writer, later falls ill and dies, his well-maintained garden declines into chaos. A big agricultural concern takes over with prefabricated buildings and modern equipment and this, too, fails. A London radio personality commits suicide. The gardener whose comings helped the writer, is fired. The man who manages the manor dies. But all this is background and does not deeply interest the reader.

Not so the landlord, who is a small enigma on his own. Naipaul catches fleeting glimpses of him but makes no attempt to know him. The tenant is content with accidental information. The owner rendered more mysterious by random images, takes his place in a seemingly imaginative life. "We were—or had started—at opposite ends of wealth, privilege, and in the hearts of different cultures."

What then is the attraction of this work is neither entirely autobiographical nor adequately a novel? Its attraction is based on certain assumptions, not the least of which is that you would like to know what Naipaul is really like; why, having been "homeless" for so long, he should in late middle age find a home in Wiltshire and at that a decaying, though still beautiful home. The other assumption is that you recognise, and are interested in, the peculiar diminutive beauty of English countryside, can tie it up with England's post-war decadence and can look back with imaginative nostalgia to a country and a people fallen into comparative obscurity, but perhaps more beautiful now than in the heyday of her imperial grandeur. Naipaul has a trick of weaving threads between distant places! The falling-apart of things in Wiltshire, with the falling-apart of things in his native Trinidad. They are two faces of decadence. One is beautiful, the other touching because associated with memories of childhood.

There is yet another, and a better reason for being attracted by this enigma. It is that the book is Naipaul's odyssey. He did not dream that he would find his home in decaying Wiltshire but the fact is that he is exactly fitted to be the recorder of what rural England now actually looks like, the old and the new continuing together in some bemused and placidly doomed relationship. The British Empire, as a parting gift to this talented son, gave him a language and an education, scholarships that brought him to Oxford and peace in the larger autumnal peace of a Wiltshire cottage.

Naipaul says: "I felt a great sympathy for my landlord. I felt I could understand his malaise; I saw it as the other side of my own. I did not think of my landlord as a failure. Words like failure and success didn't apply… Rather I wondered at the historical chain that had brought us together—he in his house, I in his cottage, the wild garden his taste (as I was told) and also mine."

You have to be patient to read this book. You have to be imaginative to profit from it. And you have, inspite of his fastidiousness, to like Naipaul to enjoy it. For it is clearly his odyssey, and an odyssey with a difference. Few young men from such societies as Trinidad's have struggled as he has, so quietly, so effectively to "arrive" at what is even to him an enigmatic destination. For Naipaul clearly loves this home of his mature years. There are among us many who love the English language and its literature, with all the power of which we know it to be capable. There are many who admire Wiltshire for her peculiar beauty, but do not for this reason love England or the English legacy. Our response to the book is one of understanding, but not of close sympathy or agreement.

Panorama: *An Anthology of Modern Indian Short Stories*; edited by Mulk Raj Anand and S. Balu Rao; Sterling Publishers Private Ltd.; Printed pages 240; 1986; Rs. 125

While several English writers and critics have held that the short story in England is "a dying form", the Indian counterpart is still alive, though probably not kicking. This anthology of 21 stories from 14 Indian languages including English in original, has variety of theme and local colour and the expected regional diversity of a country in which the regional is artistically so much more vivid and real than the national. The age-range of the authors is wide, though not wide enough to be truly representative for the year of publication. Anita Desai, 49 in 1986, is the youngest contributor; Mulk Raj Anand at 80 is the oldest. What, one wonders, has happened to the abundance of good short story writers of between 25 and 49 years of age? One recalls recent collections such as *Truth-tales* (Kali for Women) and *Rhythms* a collection of Lakshmi Kannan's stories (Vikas) both of which make a bigger impact.

Panorama does contain work by women. In addition to Anita Desai, there is Amrita Pritam in a characteristically trenchant Punjabi short story, *The Third Woman*; Qurratulain Hyder in a much anthologised charming period piece in Urdu on Dehra Dun—*Memories of an Indian Childhood*; and there is Kamala Das's *Running Away From Home*, in the stream of consciousness manner. But none of these is any longer a young woman-writer, and so the anthology fails to present the changing face of women's lives in India. As these, including a strident feminism, are an essential part of post-war Indian social history and writing, the omission is serious. The presence of such modern writers as Suniti Aphale, Ila Mehta and Lakshmi Kannan would have added zest and flavour to what is generally a rather tame and weary collection of old stories.

Mr. Balu Rao explains in his introduction that to qualify for inclusion, the stories had to be good *qua* story and had to contain a specifically Indian experience. All 21 stories meet this minimal requirement, but I cannot think that the foreign reader, for whose benefit the book was prepared so as to meet the deadline of the Frankfurt Book Fair, can have formed a dynamic impression of modern life as it is lived in this sub-continental country. The older writers—Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan—are expectedly present with expectedly typical work, but neither *The Lost Child* (Anand) nor *An Astrologer's Day* (Narayan) does anything to enhance the prestige today of the Indian short story. Where is that modern writing from the Punjab, from Gujarat, from Bengal and Tamil Nadu that makes the reader of any nationality sit up and say: "But that's good. So something's happening. People are angry or indignant or both."?

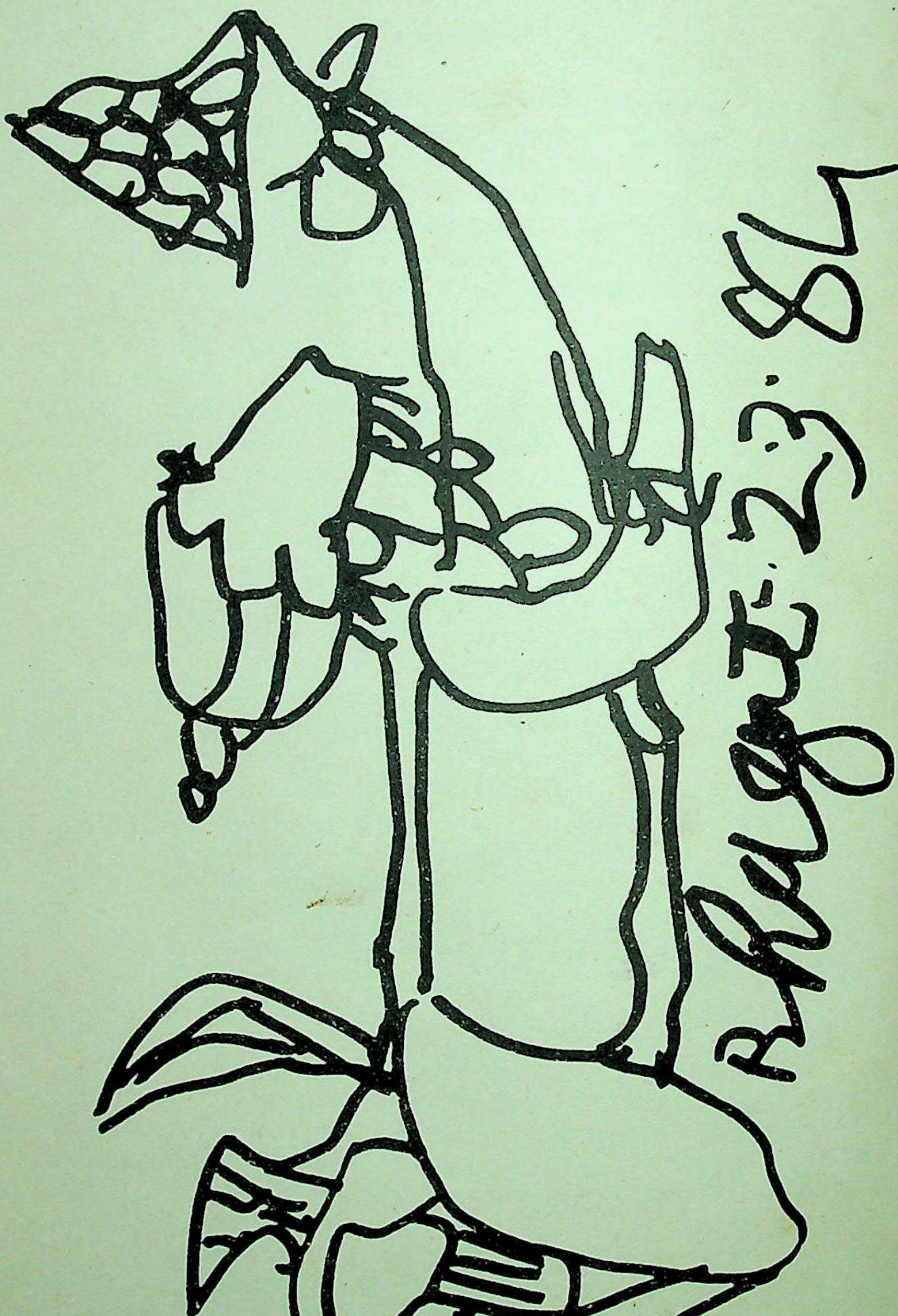
There are of course moments of anger and indignation, as in the Marathi story *Gallows* by Daya Pawar, which is a shot in the arm after the staleness of the old timers. Among the best in the collection is a Hindi story that is neither angry nor indignant by Ajneya, also an old-timer—*Jailor Amin Chand*. This is subtle comedy, with the touch of irony that we will miss now that Ajneya is no longer with us. Also interesting and blessedly short is another Hindi story, *The Victor*, by Raghuvir Sahay, in which the hero is a newly-born child of parents who did not really desire to have a child.

The two stories that are laid in foreign countries, Nirmal Verma's *A Night in London* (Hindi) and *One Touch of Garlic* (Tamil) are interesting because regional-cum-national character appears to survive the process of transplantation respectively to England and the US. In both cases the Indian remains himself and responds in a characteristically Indian way to a foreign situation.

When an anthology depends as much as this one does on translation, the quality of translation is a matter of major importance. The translators are listed with honour, as are the authors, but not all of them deserve high commendation. The English of many stories leaves something to be desired where the author has not himself/herself translated it. Ajneya and Hyder take no chances—they translate their own work, and their

English leaves little to be desired. The result in both cases is very satisfying. This is not so of other translations from Hindi, Oriya and Malayalam.

The total effect may be as Indian as the co-editors desired it to be. But as assembled specimens of the best in the modern short story form, the anthology is not likely to stimulate interest either in life in India today, or in the quality of writing in modern India.



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